UNIVERSIDADE DE LISBOA

INSTITUTO DE CIÊNCIAS SOCIAIS

Parliamentary online public engagement in the 21st Century: A comparative perspective with a focus on Austria and Portugal

Sofia Raquel Serra-Silva

Orientadora: Professora Doutora Marina Costa Lobo

Tese especialmente elaborada para a obtenção do grau de Doutor em Ciência Política, na especialidade de Política Comparada

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AR	Assembleia da República
AT	Austria
BE	Belgium
BG	Bulgaria
DAP	Parliamentary support of Directorate (Direção de Apoio Parlamentar)
DE	Germany
DILP	Legislative and Parliamentary Information Division (Divisão de Informação Legislativa e Parlamentar)
DK	Denmark
EE	Estonia
ECPRD	European Center for Parliamentary Research and Documentation
ES	Spain
EU	European Union
FL	Finland
FR	France
fsQCA	fuzzy set Qualitative Comparative Analysis
GR	Greece
HR	Croatia
HU	Hungary
IE	Ireland
IPU	Inter-parliamentary Union
IT	Italy
NL	Netherlands
PT	Portugal
PW	Parliamentary Website
QCA	Qualitative Comparative Analysis
RO	Romania
SE	Sweden
SK	Slovakia
SL	Slovenia
UK	United Kingdom

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ABSTRACT

This thesis concerns how parliaments, as institutions, utilise the Internet (and ICTs) to reach and engage citizen. It is structured around the concept of *parliamentary (online) public engagement*, which has only recently gained some attention in the research agendas of political science and legislative studies. This concept covers a very wide range of outlets and activities offered by parliaments, which can have different purposes and can assume both passive and active forms of engaging with citizens. This thesis focuses on a comparative study of PWs in 21 countries in Europe, and it is complemented by multiple case studies. A mixed method approach was applied, relying on both quantitative and qualitative data and methods. First, the measurement and description of parliamentary online public engagement activities and tools in 21 European parliaments was undergone. Then, it proceeded to a qualitative strand, first assessing the causal conditions necessary and/or sufficient for explaining the results from the quantitative strand and second studying in two case studies in depth – Portugal and Austria – in order to understand the relevant mechanisms, processes and critical actors behind parliaments' online public engagement strategies over time.

Empirically, the study finds that *parliaments are selective* in their strategies for engaging with the public. In their selectivity, most parliaments choose to *invest largely in information provision*, leaving other activities of public engagement as secondary. This means that most *parliaments have not yet implemented activities and tools to truly engage with their citizens.* Additionally, some of the *examples found are of an experimental nature or are still in their infancy*. Furthermore, parliaments still have *a long way to go in pursuing the way they delivery* public engagement activities to their audiences. Descriptive results also show that *parliaments are cautious* when it comes to citizen's actual participation in the policymaking and prefer to convert conventional forms of participation to digital versions instead of creating innovative democratic instruments. From the explanatory analysis it was possible to conclude that besides parliamentary resources, a *committed leadership and political will from key critical actors are also important* when it comes to changing the way parliaments engage with citizens through digital media. Additionally, these institutions are *mimicking other parliaments* that are perceived as successful in using ICTs to communicate and engage with citizens as a response to environmental uncertainty. Finally, it seems that *inter-parliamentary cooperation, i.e. learning mechanisms, are increasingly relevant for parliaments* on these matters.

Keywords: Public engagement; Parliaments; Europe; Austria; Portugal.

SUMMARY

Esta tese analisa a forma como os parlamentos nacionais utilizam as Tecnologias de Informação e Comunicação (TIC) para se relacionarem com os seus cidadãos, através de uma análise comparada de 21 democracias europeias e de dois estudos de caso.

A investigação estrutura-se em torno do conceito de envolvimento público ou envolvimento dos cidadãos (*public engagement*). Este conceito abrange uma multiplicidade de meios e actividades oferecidas pelos parlamentos, que podem ter finalidades diferentes e assumir tanto formas passivas como ativas de envolvimento com os cidadãos. A investigação foca-se em três questões essenciais de pesquisa. Primeiro, quais as ferramentas e recursos disponíveis nos websites dos parlamentos nacionais para promover o envolvimento online do público? Segundo, porque variam entre os países os níveis de envolvimento do parlamento com o público? E finalmente, quais são os mecanismos, processos e actores críticos que explicam as estratégias de envolvimento dos parlamentos com o público ao longo do tempo?

Seguiu-se a abordagem de método misto (*mixed methods*) que combina métodos, técnicas e dados quantitativos e qualitativos. Em primeiro lugar foram medidas e analisadas as informações, as actividades, as ferramentas e os recursos dos websites dos 21 parlamentos. Em seguida, já na vertente qualitativa do estudo, foram analisadas as condições causais necessárias e/ou suficientes para explicar os resultados obtidos anteriormente. Por fim, foram realizados dois estudos de caso que permitiram concretizar uma análise aprofundada para compreender os mecanismos, os processos relevantes e os actores críticos por detrás das estratégias de envolvimento online dos parlamentos português e austríaco com o público ao longo do tempo.

Em toda a Europa e por todo o mundo, os parlamentos têm vindo a reforçar os seus mecanismos de contacto com os cidadãos, adaptando-se às ferramentas agora disponibilizados pelas TIC (Dai e Norton, 2007; Griffith e Leston-Bandeira, 2012c). Em paralelo com as funções tradicionais de legislação, representação, escrutínio e legitimação, os parlamentos contemporâneos desenvolvem – ou procuram desenvolver – cada vez mais, uma nova função de promoção do envolvimento dos cidadãos na vida parlamentar. E esta tendência acentuou-se a partir do momento em que o agravamento de indicadores como a apatia e o desinteresse pela política, a insatisfação ou a falta de confiança nas instituições políticas fizeram soar os alarmes.

As últimas décadas foram caracterizadas pelo surgimento da era da informação (Castells, 1997) e por mudanças aprimoradas pelas TIC, na qual a Internet desempenha um

papel cada vez mais importante na comunicação e na formação da opinião pública (Savigny, 2002). Deste modo, entender como uma instituição política central como o parlamento se está a adaptar às ferramentas da Internet e às possibilidades que daí advêm é, portanto, crucial para encarar alguns dos desafios enfrentados pelas democracias de hoje (Leston-Bandeira, 2009).

A literatura tem demonstrado que os parlamentos nunca foram tão activos no desenvolvimento de estratégias para promover o envolvimento com o público (Hansard Society, 2011b; IPU, 2012; Leston-Bandeira e Bender, 2013). Desde o início do século XXI, 'o papel de envolver o público desenvolveu-se de tal modo que pode agora ser comparado aos outros papéis e funções mais tradicionais desempenhados pelo parlamento' (Leston-Bandeira, 2011: 3). Esta premissa reflecte-se em várias tendências já descritas pela literatura, como a implementação de serviços específicos para o desenvolvimento de actividades para envolver os cidadãos; o investimento em novos funcionários e recursos financeiros focados em comunicação e envolvimento; e a criação ou o reforço de processos que dão voz aos cidadãos no processo de tomada de decisão, como os sistemas de petições (Leston-Bandeira, 2016). Embora o envolvimento dos cidadãos abranja uma ampla variedade de actividades com diferentes finalidades – desde a disponibilização de informação à participação no processo de tomada de decisão política – o conceito pode ser definido genericamente como 'uma jornada ao longo do caminho desde a receção da informação à participação real' (Leston-Bandeira e Walker, 2018: 294).

Muitos estudos focam-se apenas nos resultados específicos do envolvimento dos cidadãos com o parlamento, especialmente aqueles que integram a visão dos cidadãos nas actividades parlamentares, como as redes sociais e as petições eletrónicas (por exemplo, Setälä e Grönlund, 2006; Dai e Norton, 2007; Carman, 2009, 2010; Fox, 2009; Joshi e Rosenfield, 2013, Bochel, 2013; Lindner e Riehm, 2009; Riehm et al., 2014). Há, contudo, uma lacuna no conhecimento sobre o processo geral das actividades de envolvimento público e sobre as ferramentas efectivamente fornecidas pelos parlamentos aos cidadãos através dos meios digitais para aumentar o envolvimento dos mesmos. Uma forma de suprimir essa lacuna é medir a oferta das oportunidades disponibilizadas aos cidadãos para que se envolvam com o parlamento. Esta medição concretiza-se através da análise dos websites parlamentares institucionais, considerando que estes representam atualmente a ‘janela’ mais visível do trabalho do parlamento para o cidadão comum (Sobaci, 2010). Estes websites são o principal meio através do qual ‘os parlamentos dão a conhecer o seu trabalho aos cidadãos e pelo qual

podem atingir o nível de transparência e responsabilidade a que aspiram' (Griffith e Leston-Bandeira, 2012).

Deste modo, o que podem os websites parlamentares dizer-nos sobre em que medida os parlamentos usam as TIC para se envolver e comunicar com o público? Para dar resposta a esta questão, este estudo baseia-se num vasto conjunto de dados primários que incluem informações detalhadas quer do conteúdo, recursos e ferramentas presentes nos websites das câmaras baixas de 21 países europeus, quer do 'delivery' dos websites ou seja, a acessibilidade, capacidade de resposta e usabilidade. Os dados referentes à usabilidade são particularmente importantes e inovadores por se tratar de uma característica considerada fundamental para o sucesso de qualquer website (Rizzo e Carughi, 2006). Bill Gates cunhou, em 1996, a frase "o conteúdo é rei", quando previu o papel que o conteúdo teria na web. Hoje, mais de 20 anos depois, essa frase foi atualizada para "o conteúdo é rei, mas a usabilidade é a rainha", reforçando a ideia de que o 'delivery' de um website é tão importante quanto o seu conteúdo. A análise do 'delivery' do website tem estado também ausente dos estudos, que não têm privilegiado a avaliação da usabilidade do conteúdo e a qualidade, precisão ou profundidade das informações fornecidas.

Esta primeira análise descritiva permitiu concluir que os parlamentos são seletivos nas suas estratégias de interação com o público e ainda que, na sua seletividade, a maioria dos parlamentos optam por investir amplamente na disponibilização de informações, remetendo outras actividades de envolvimento público para segundo plano. Na verdade, a maioria dos parlamentos ainda não implementou actividades e ferramentas para realmente envolver os seus cidadãos. Embora existam alguns exemplos e experiências a serem desenvolvidas, estes são de natureza experimental ou estão agora a ganhar ímpeto. Os parlamentos parecem posicionar-se com bastante cautela no que diz respeito à participação real dos cidadãos na formulação de políticas e preferem converter para o digital formas convencionais de participação já implementadas, em vez de criar instrumentos democráticos inovadores. Ainda no que diz respeito ao 'delivery' dos websites, é notório que os parlamentos ainda têm um longo caminho a percorrer nesta matéria.

O aumento de estudos sobre este tópico não foi acompanhado por uma análise extensiva das possíveis explicações da adoção das TIC por parte dos parlamentos. Ainda não existe um conhecimento sistemático das razões que ajudam a explicar o facto de alguns parlamentos terem investido mais do que outros em TIC para fomentar o envolvimento com os cidadãos, ou o porquê de alguns parlamentos parecerem contentar-se com formas e métodos mais simples

de envolvimento, enquanto outros vão mais além. Falta uma compreensão profunda sobre os diferentes mecanismos e processos causais que explicam a diversidade de resultados entre os países. Assim, combinando a riqueza empírica da abordagem tradicional de estudo de caso com as possibilidades inferenciais de estudos estatísticos de grande N, usou-se a análise qualitativa comparada (*qualitative comparative analisys* – QCA) desenvolvida por Charles Ragin (Ragin, 2008). Este método permite realizar uma análise estatística inferencial com poucos casos (por exemplo, de dez a cinquenta). Ao usar esta metodologia, é possível identificar as condições suficientes e necessárias que levaram aos diferentes níveis de envolvimento por parte dos parlamentos.

A análise baseia-se num modelo causal em dois níveis: um nível sistémico (macro), como o contexto tecnológico e político no qual os parlamentos operam, e um nível organizacional (meso), referente às características organizacionais e burocráticas dos parlamentos. Como a tecnologia não age no vácuo e o "ciberespaço" não é uma entidade independente do seu contexto offline, espera-se que este tenha influência na forma como os parlamentos usam as TIC e a Internet para se relacionarem com os cidadãos (Leston-Bandeira, 2007). O estudo das actividades públicas dos parlamentos exige que seja tido em conta o 'cenário institucional e a cultura política na qual os parlamentos estão inseridos' (Pollack, 2014: 110).

Especificamente, quatro hipóteses foram avaliadas: duas explicações estruturais – desconfiança política e contexto tecnológico – e duas explicações organizacionais e burocráticas – aprendizagem e recursos. Quatro conclusões principais emergiram desta análise. Primeiro, os parlamentos digitais são o resultado da agência dos actores políticos que neles operam e um subproduto de factores estruturais e contextuais. Segundo, embora as condições estruturais e organizacionais tenham alguma repercussão na oferta geral de envolvimento (online) dos parlamentos, nenhuma delas é uma condição necessária. Terceiro – e como esperado –, as estruturas dos parlamentos, nomeadamente os seus recursos humanos e financeiros, são um ingrediente-chave para explicar a falta de uma forte estratégia de envolvimento online com o público. Quarto, os mecanismos de aprendizagem, como a exposição a redes internacionais que promovem uma agenda digital para os parlamentos, nem sempre se traduzem numa melhor oferta de actividades e ferramentas de envolvimento parlamentar com o público.

Por fim, esta tese tem ainda como objetivo entender quais são os mecanismos, processos e actores críticos que explicam as estratégias de envolvimento online dos parlamentos com o

público ao longo do tempo. Esta terceira questão de pesquisa aprimora os resultados anteriores e analisa detalhadamente, através de dois estudos de caso, os elementos que nenhum dos métodos anteriores foi capaz de identificar. A influência do contexto offline é tão complexa e multidirecional que foi necessário olhar mais profundamente e considerar outros mecanismos de causalidade através do método de *process-tracing* e entrevistas semiestruturadas a elites políticas, realizadas durante o trabalho de campo, de modo a enriquecer e complementar a narrativa.

Assim, esta terceira parte da investigação permitiu desvendar que além da importância atribuída aos recursos parlamentares, uma liderança comprometida e vontade política dos principais actores críticos é igualmente importante quando se trata de mudar a forma como os parlamentos se envolvem com os cidadãos através das ferramentas digitais. Além disso, esta análise permitiu desvendar que as instituições parlamentares imitam outros parlamentos percecionados como bem-sucedidos no uso das TIC para comunicar com os cidadãos como resposta à "incerteza ambiental". Foi ainda possível concluir que a cooperação interparlamentar e os seus respectivos mecanismos de aprendizagem são também relevantes para os parlamentos.

Palavras-chave: Envolvimento; Cidadãos; Parlamentos; Europa; Áustria; Portugal.

INTRODUCTION

'Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood.
Now is the time to understand more, so that we may fear less'.
Marie Curie

The early years of the twenty-first century have witnessed a democratic paradox. Democracy, both as an ideal and as a set of political institutions and practices, has triumphed in most countries around the world; however, at the same time, there has also been considerable disillusionment developing with the results of democracy in practice. In other words, one can say that 'the paradox of our times is that we hail the victory of democracy while lamenting the fact that in many countries parliament[1] – the central institution of democracy – is facing a crisis of legitimacy' (Beetham, 2006: vii). Others have also referred to this phenomenon as a broad crisis of representation (Hayward, 2012). Moreover, public access to parliament has never been greater, but the public's mood of remoteness and alienation from the formal democratic process has never been more acute (Coleman, 2007).

In Europe, long-term trends such as declining levels in voter turnout (Mair, 2013), trust in government institutions (Nye et al., 1997; Hetherington, 1998) and parliaments (Hibbing e Theiss-Morse, 1995, 2001; Torcal, 2016),[2] and the growth in apathy, disaffection, political discontent and the feeling of powerlessness in the face of political affairs (Nye et al, 1997; Gastil, 2000; Eisenberg and Cepik, 2002; Dahlberg et al., 2014) have corroborated this idea of a democratic paradox in today's politics. While a broad 'crisis of democracy' has proved to be exaggerated, indicators suggest increasing numbers of critical citizens characterised by high expectations of democracy as an ideal and yet low evaluations of the actual performance of representative institutions (Norris, 2001a). In summary, 'citizens

[1] The words "legislature" and "parliament" are often used interchangeably. Following Michael Laver (2006:121) distinction: "Legislatures legislate; they pass laws. The notion of a "legislature" is thus located firmly in the classical view of a separation of powers between legislature, executive and judiciary". While, a "parliament" does legislate, in contemporary politics "is also something much more than a legislature. In the constitutional structure of "parliamentary government" that characterizes most European states, where the executive is constitutionally responsible to the legislature.

[2] However, this is not a general phenomenon, even after the great recession began in 2008 (Torcal, 2016).

continue to believe in the desirability of democracy', but at the same time they possess little confidence in some key democratic institutions (Dalton, 2000: 35). The negative feelings and attitudes towards formal political institutions and politicians crosses both new and old democracies (Morlino, 1998; Klingemann, 1999; Stoker, 2016).

Since parliaments are 'one of the major pillars of representative democracy' (Thomassen, 2014), some believe they have a key role in addressing this paradox (Beetham, 2006; Leston-Bandeira, 2012c). As central institutions of democracy, they embody the will of the people in government and carry all of their expectations that democracy will be truly responsive to their needs and help solve the most pressing problems that confront them in their daily lives. As the elected bodies that represent societies in all of their diversity, parliaments have a unique responsibility for reconciling the conflicting interests and expectations of different groups and communities through the democratic means of dialogue and compromise (Beetham, 2006).

With the advent of technology and new media, some have believed that there is potential to make representative institutions, including parliaments, more transparent, accessible and open to interactive discussion, therefore addressing the 'democratic paradox' (Coleman, 2006). In the early days of the Internet, 'cyber democrats' predicted that representative institutions would be radically transformed – or would even become obsolete – in the face of the public's capacity to state views and vote on issues that interested them (Becker and Slaton, 2000). However, the democratic potential of the Internet has been questioned from a number of perspectives, especially from the cyber-sceptic viewpoint; even among most cyber optimists, there is a certain degree of disagreement. Rather than regarding the Internet as a means of transcending representative structures, it has recently been seen as a tool for refashioning and strengthening the hitherto weak and neglected relationships between representative institutions and the represented (Coleman & Gøtze, 2002; Coleman, 2007). Nevertheless, the Internet remains relevant for the interaction between citizens and parliaments and has 'increasingly, for better or for worse, impinging upon the parliamentary process' (Coleman et al., 1999: 367). This may have direct or indirect consequences for the functioning of democratic systems, the nature of parliamentary representation and parliaments themselves (Leston-Bandeira and Thompson, 2018).

As the above discussion suggests, further studies are needed to better understand the relation between parliaments and citizens and to assess the parliamentary public engagement activities currently in place, while rethinking the current understanding of the key concepts of

contemporary democracy such as 'representation', 'engagement' and 'deliberation.' Therefore, this thesis is focused on the changes that the advent of the Internet and digital media have brought to the relationship between parliaments and citizens. It is structured around the concept of *parliamentary (online) public engagement,* which has only recently gained some attention in the research agendas of political science and legislative studies. This concept covers a very wide range of outlets and activities offered by parliaments, which can have different purposes and can assume both passive and active forms of engaging with citizens. As an institution 'often put at the centre of the political disengagement discourse' (Leston-Bandeira and Bender, 2013: 283), digital and social media can offer parliaments 'many new possibilities of engagement' (Ibid.). Although parliaments are using digital information and communication technologies widely, there is limited use of interactive features which allow citizens to comment and deliberate on policy issues (Norris, 2001a; Trechsel et al., 2003; Triga & Milioni, 2014; Coleman, 2006). What results from this debate is the need to empirically explore whether parliaments continue to use ICTs according to a monologic model, focusing mainly on providing information to the public, or according to a more interactive model, opening up opportunities for two-way communication and participation at multiple levels, which creates the conditions for citizens to exert influence over parliamentary activities.

FROM RESEARCH PROBLEM TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Across Europe and elsewhere, parliaments have reinforced their mechanisms of contact with citizens by adapting to ICT tools (Dai & Norton, 2007; Griffith & Leston-Bandeira, 2012c). The last decades have been characterised by the emergence of the information age (Castells, 1997) and by changes enhanced by ICTs, where the Internet plays an increasingly important role in communicating and forming a public opinion (Savigny, 2002). Understanding how a central political institution such as parliament is adapting to the Internet's tools and the possibilities these open up is therefore crucial to addressing some of the challenges faced by today's democracies (Leston-Bandeira, 2009).

Nowadays, parliaments can make use of digital media to come into direct contact with their citizens and engage with them without intermediaries. Potentially, the Internet and other technology-related tools could lead the way to rejuvenating parliaments and strengthening relations between them and the citizens they serve. In fact, there is evidence that some parliaments are implementing a range of initiatives designed to enhance their relationships with citizens (IPU, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018). These mostly tend to be characterised by a desire to

make the institution open, transparent and more inclusive of public opinion, while simultaneously increasing popular understanding and appreciation of parliament's role (IPU, 2012), since these are crucial challenges parliaments are facing. Now, the question to pose is *what tools and features are available on the websites of national parliaments to promote online public engagement?* (RQ1) This is an important question at any time, but it is especially important in the context of the past two decades given the increasing relevance of the Internet and ICTs in societies among both individuals and political institutions (Gerodimos, 2004).

Not long ago, the question being asked was 'which parliaments are online?', given the state of the field and the novelty of digital tools at the time. This question motivated the early works of Coleman et al. (1999), Norris (2001a) and Treschel et al. (2003). However, there is currently evidence that European parliaments (along with other public and political institutions) are present in the virtual world on multiple online platforms, ranging from static websites to social media platforms such as Facebook or Twitter.[3] Furthermore, European citizens are now more integrated online than ever before, since more than two-thirds (76%) of the EU population used the Internet daily in 2018, compared to only slightly more than a third (38%) in 2007.[4] Several experts and politicians now recognise ICTs to be powerful tools for enhancing citizen engagement in public policy making (Coleman and Norris, 2005). Although scholars have moved on from the question 'which parliaments are online?', little is still known about the overall process of public engagement activities, especially in the online context.

Research shows that parliaments have never been this active in developing strategies to promote public engagement (Hansard Society, 2011b; IPU, 2012; Leston-Bandeira and Bender, 2013). Since the beginning of the 21st century, 'the role of public engagement has also developed to a point that it can now be equated to the other more traditional roles played by parliament' (Leston-Bandeira, 2011:3) and has become a core element of parliamentary strategic planning. This is expressed in a number of ways which are already reported in the literature, such as the implementation of services specific to the delivery of public engagement activities; the investment in new staff and financial resources focused on communication and engagement; the development of activities to raise awareness and understanding of

[3] At the beginning of the millennium, only 57% of the 179 national parliaments worldwide had a website (Norris, 2001), a number which later increased to 97% in 2006.

[4] Source: Data from Eurostat (2007 and 2018). Percentage of Internet use among individuals aged between 16 and 74, every day or almost every day on average within the last 3 months before the survey. Use includes all locations and methods of access and any purpose (private or work/business related).

parliamentary business, roles and significance; and the creation or strengthening of processes that integrate citizens' voices into the decision-making process, such as petition systems (Leston-Bandeira, 2016). Even though public engagement covers a very wide range of outlets and activities with different purposes, ranging from information to participation in public policy, it can be defined generically as 'a journey along a path from receipt of information to actual participation, and it can, therefore, assume both passive and active forms' (Leston-Bandeira and Walker, 2018:294).

A wealth of studies have focused on specific areas and outputs of parliamentary public engagement – especially those that integrate citizens' views into parliamentary activities, such as new media and e-petitions (for example, Setälä and Grönlund, 2006; Dai and Norton, 2007; Carman, 2009, 2010; Fox, 2009; Joshi and Rosenfield, 2013, Bochel, 2013; Lindner and Riehm, 2009; Riehm et al., 2014) – but there is a lack of information about the overall process of public engagement activities and which tools parliaments are actually providing to citizens through the use of digital media to enhance public engagement. One way to fill this gap is by measuring parliaments' supply of online public engagement by looking at *parliaments' institutional websites*, considering that they are among the essential digital tools available, and they represent the most common and visible feature for ordinary citizens (Sobaci, 2010).

The establishment of parliamentary websites (PWs) constitutes an important part of the development of ICTs in politics, yet they receive far less attention compared to the websites of individual representatives and other political actors (such as parties or governments). They are the primary means 'by which parliaments make their work known to citizens and by which they can achieve the level of transparency and accountability to which they aspire' (Griffith and Leston-Bandeira, 2012).

What can PWs tell us about the extent to which parliaments use ICTs to engage and communicate with the public? To this end, this study relies on a vast original dataset that includes detailed information of the content, features and tools present in the websites of the lower chambers of 21 European countries and on website delivery, i.e. the accessibility, responsiveness and usability of PWs. The latter kind of data is particularly important and innovative, since usability is considered a fundamental feature for the success of any website (Rizzo and Carughi, 2006). Bill Gates coined the phrase 'content is king' in 1996, when he predicted the role that content would play on the Web. Today, more than 20 years later, this phrase has been updated to 'content is king, but usability is queen', reinforcing the idea that the delivery of a website is as important as its content. Analysis on website delivery has also

been absent from related scholarship, which has not privileged the evaluation of content usability and the quality, accuracy or even depth of the information provided.

The rise of scholarship on this topic was not accompanied by an extensive examination of the possible explanations beyond parliaments' adoption of ICTs. There is still a lack of systematic knowledge on why some parliaments are investing more than others in ICTs to engage with their citizens, or why some parliaments seem to settle for the most simple ways of engaging while others are 'pushing the envelope'. There is still a lack a deep understanding regarding the different mechanisms and processes that might intervene between forms of digital communication and political outcomes among institutions, such as the supply of parliamentary online public engagement activities. Therefore, an assessment of parliaments' supply of online public engagement allows a deeper analysis and helps disclose the factors that could explain the different patterns across parliaments, thus answering the question *why do the levels of online parliamentary online public engagement supply vary across countries?* (RQ2)

While the different conditions that are favourable for politicians' and citizens' usage of the Internet for political purposes are well documented, the exact combinations of conditions concerning collective political institutions such as parliaments remains a completely open, empirical question. Based on an explorative approach to the problem, this thesis assesses the combinations of conditions that led to parliaments' supply of e-engagement tools and activities. The analysis focuses on a two-layered causal model, with one layer situated at the systemic (macro) level, such as the technological and political context in which parliaments operate, and one layer at the organisational (meso) level, namely parliaments' organisational features. Since technology does not act in a vacuum and 'cyberspace' is not an independent entity from the offline context, 'cyberspace' is expected to play an influence on the way European parliaments are using ICT and the Internet in their relationship with citizens (Leston-Bandeira, 2007), as is the offline context where parliaments operate, such as the political culture. Studying the public activities of parliaments requires us to take into account the 'institutional setting and the political culture in which parliaments are embedded' (Pollak, 2014: 110).

Drawing on arguments based on the social shaping of technology and the literature on new institutionalism, this thesis also argues that the use of the Internet is shaped differently depending on distinct institutional settings (Zittel, 2003). Context matters, and the adaptability of conventional actors in the political system is expected to be shaped in large part by their existing internal norms and patterns of behaviour as well as their political environments (Needham, 2003). Therefore, given the existence of a multitude of political, cultural and

socioeconomic environments, the assumption is that parliaments' strategies of online public engagement will eventually flourish in many versions, which are different in scope and design.

Lastly, this thesis aims to understand *what are the mechanisms, processes and critical actors explaining parliaments' online public engagement strategies over time?* (RQ3) This third research question concludes the thesis with the discussion and the refinement of the previous results, as well the analysis of the elements that either of the previous methods were not able to identify, by analysing two case studies in detail, which were the result of a series of fieldwork activities. The influence of the offline context is so complex and multidirectional that it is necessary to take a deeper look and consider other *mechanisms of causality* through elite semi-structured interviews and document analysis, conducted during fieldwork, to enrich and complement the narrative. This question not only sheds light on the chain of *events and process (and actors)* that lead from one situation or event to another, but also provides (or encourages) deeper, more direct and more refined explanations for the results (Hedström and Swedberg, 1998). This question helps unveil the ways in which parliaments adapt, change and reform themselves in the context of the World Wide Web, since representative institutions 'are, in particular, prone to frequent, if seemingly peripatetic, changes or reforms. Put differently, legislatures or parliaments may be highly adaptive organizations' (Copeland and Patterson, 1997: 7).

The Internet and ICTs are becoming more and more embedded in the interaction between citizens and parliaments in the 21st century and are impinging upon the parliamentary process. These two trends are, to some extent, already shifting the functioning of democratic systems, the nature of parliamentary representation and parliaments themselves (Thompson and Leston-Bandeira, 2018). The contemporary parliament is a 'multifaceted institution, performing a wide range of roles within an increasingly complex environment where representative democracy itself seems to be increasingly challenged as our ruling paradigm' (Ibid: 9). This is why it matters to understand not only how and why central political institutions – such as parliaments – are adapting to the Internet to embrace their new roles of *public engagement*, but also what this ultimately might represent for democracies in the twenty-first century.

EMPIRICAL STRATEGY

This thesis concerns how parliaments, as institutions, utilise the Internet (and ICTs) to reach and engage citizens. Inspired by Vaccari's (2008) work on 'digital politics', this broad

domain is designated as 'digital parliaments'. Like any technological artefact, digital parliaments are the result of how parliaments employ its affordances, that is, the possible uses that can be made of it. This process can be understood by analysing the supply side (the online presence of parliaments, which structure the contents and opportunities provided by parliaments that citizens encounter on the Internet), as well as the demand side (the political actions that citizens undertake online to engage with parliaments). However, given the limitations of this research (financial and human resources were not suited for a large scope of analysis including the demand side), this thesis only covers the supply side – parliaments' strategies of online public engagement.

Conceiving of parliaments as collective actors (Scharpf, 2000) distinguishes three sets of actors (Pollak, 2014): parliament as institutions, parliamentary party groups (PGs) and individual members of parliament (MPs). All three actors – parliaments, PGs and MPs – play roles in the chain of parliamentary representation. However, while MPs' individual websites and social media profiles and parties' online endeavours have been extensively discussed within this framework (e.g. Vaccari, 2013; Tromble, 2018), parliament as an institution has been left out of these discussions to some extent. Nonetheless, ICTs have made parliament better known as an institution, in particular through official PWs and social media profiles. In political systems where parliamentary identity usually blends in with party identity, ICTs have brought an extra dimension to the relationships between parliaments and citizens (Leston-Bandeira, 2008). Gone are the days when parties acted as the only institutionalised representation of the electorate. Today, parliaments have developed institutional profiles and activities, alongside multiple digital channels to inform, contact and engage with citizens, mainly through PWs, which have become the main form of interface with the public.

In order to understand the supply side of *digital parliaments,* looking at parliament as an institution, a mixed method approach was applied, relying on both quantitative and qualitative data and methods throughout the thesis (see the complete Research Design in Chapter II). This thesis focuses on a comparative study of PWs in 21 countries in Europe, and it is complemented by multiple case studies.

Research Design

Since this thesis tackles different research questions, it requires a research design that makes possible to understand *how* parliaments are adapting to the Internet to embrace their

new roles of public engagement. This addresses the *explanations* of such a diverse supply of online engagement activities among national parliaments in Europe and aims to understand the *actors, processes and mechanisms* by which parliaments are changing and adapting their relationship with citizens though the use of ICTs, in particular by using websites and social media to engage with them. Therefore, a mixed method approach was applied, using a hybrid explanatory sequential design (Creswell et al., 2003), which starts with a quantitative phase and continues with a second and third qualitative phase.

First, the extent to which parliaments in Europe are adapting to ICTs and the Internet to promote online public engagement is identified. A *meta-analysis* of previous coding frames employed in relevant previous studies was used herein. Based on this meta-analysis, 40 variables were selected to perform a *manual quantitative content analysis* of PWs. A global and multidimensional index of online public engagement supply (*e-engagement index*) was created to measure the extent to which parliaments are using ICTs to promote *online public engagement*, unveiling how the tools, features and information on PWs differ between parliaments. Additionally, a few measures of website delivery, such as usability, accessibility and responsiveness, were compiled.

The second phase of analysis is mostly concerned with explaining the cross-national differences found among parliaments. Thus, it combines the empirical richness of the traditional case-study approach with the inferential possibilities of large-N statistical studies by using Charles Ragin's innovative fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fs/QCA) (Ragin, 2008). This method allows for a form of inferential statistical analysis with few cases (e.g. ten to fifty). However, even if ten to fifty cases is miniscule from a traditional statistical perspective, it presents an interesting challenge to the researcher who wants to use fs/QCA. By using this methodology, the sufficient and necessary conditions that led to parliaments' different levels of e-engagement supply can be identified. Specifically, four hypotheses will be assessed considering both the impact of structural and contextual factors as well as organizational and bureaucratic features of parliaments.

Finally, in the third phase of analysis, a *qualitative multiple case study approach* (Yin, 2014) explains how parliaments have been implementing a strategy of e-engagement over the years and by which *processes and mechanisms (and actors)* parliaments are changing and adapting their relationships with citizens through the use of ICTs. Based on process tracing and in-depth semi structured interviews with parliamentary officials and MPs and additional

materials, two parliaments – Austria and Portugal – were chosen for an in-depth study of the processes and mechanisms beyond their online parliamentary public engagement strategies.

While the previous cross-national approaches provide an explanation comparing different cases at a single unique point of time, the final phase of the analysis in this thesis facilitates an understanding of how parliaments have been changing over the years since they started to realise the potential of ICT tools and began developing an online public engagement strategy. This approach will unveil some new explanatory factors, conditions and mechanisms that might refine the findings or fill the gaps left open by the previous analyses concerning the variables that explain the supply side of parliaments on these matters.

Case Selection

As mentioned above, this study focuses on a subset of 21 lower chambers in Europe (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Romania and the United Kingdom).[5] These encompass a variety of parliaments in terms of functions, roles, size and even nomenclatures (Norton, 1990). Europe is a great and unique laboratory for an in-depth study of the relationship between parliaments, citizens and the Internet.

In the impossibility of studying the entire universe of European countries, given the limited resources in both human and financial terms, a subset of countries were chosen for analysis. Hence, this research takes into consideration as many political, cultural and geographical European contexts as is reasonably feasible in order to circumvent small-N problems related to scarcity of statistical power and avoid large-N problems associated with lack of comparability. Thus, the cases were selected following two main criteria: 1) *geographical area* – to achieve a balance of geographical representation in the context of the European Union – and 2) *political and institutional contexts* – to achieve a balance of diversity among parliaments regarding their institutional characteristics such as method of election, democratic history, size, age and roles. By looking at different institutional and geographical contexts, it is easier to understand the extent to which parliaments are using the Internet and ICTs to strengthen relationships with citizens.

[5] See Chapter II for more details on the case selection.

GAPS IN THE LITERATURE AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Theoretical Contributions

The recent and growing body of literature that examines ICTs and their impact on parliaments has been divided into different approaches and fields. Some of the previous analyses take a public administration perspective, whereas others take a broader democratic governance perspective. In addition, some valuable contributions have been made by the Internet studies community, while others have been presented by the legislative studies community. Although these two main approaches are rich in their different perspectives, methods and results, this has also meant that there have been some challenges in analysing and measuring how parliaments are adapting to the new opportunities for public engagement afforded by digital media, i.e., to measure parliaments' supply of e-engagement. Hence, by focusing on a legislative studies framework, this research places parliament as a central institution in parliamentary democracies at the centre of the whole analysis.

Additionally, regarding the study of Internet and politics, there have been far more contributions dealing with election campaigns than research about off-peak times (Jungherr, 2014). Research focused on off-peak times tends to be reduced and focuses mostly on *e-petition systems* (Wright, 2012; Carman, 2009, 2014; Bochel, 2013; Leston-Bandeira, 2019) and *e-government* (e.g. Mcnutt, 2012). Also, although representatives' (Polat, 2005; Tenscher ,2014; Vicente-Merino, 2007) and parties' (Gibson and Ward, 2002; Jackson and Lilleker, 2011; Vaccari, 2008, 2013) use of information communication technologies (ICTs) is now well documented, the study of how parliaments are using those mechanisms is still in its infancy.

This is partially a result from the fact that scholarship that focuses on the parliament-citizen relationship is still rare (Norton, 2005). Only recently the relationship between parliament and citizens have gained considerably more visibility, thanks to the opportunities brought in by the development of new media. Some parliaments across the world have undergone significant reforms over the last few years not only by taking advantage of ICTs, Internet channels, and tools, but also by supporting a deeper public engagement with parliament (Leston-Bandeira, 2016).

Nowadays legislatures are expected to actively reach out to their public. At the same time, the public is also seeking openness and transparency in their political institutions (OECD, 2009), as well as more inclusive modes of democracy (Cain et al., 2003), which makes a good case for studying how and why parliaments are adopting digital media to engage with citizens.

The expansion of new citizens' demands illustrate the importance of not narrowing the conceptualising of representation only around the elective chain since this miss out a considerable part of modern politics. We are not questioning the significance of representative democracy, but suggesting the need to widen the understanding of representation, parliament and democracy, in order to comprehend parliaments nowadays.

Hence, this study contributes to this recent field by bringing new and comparative empirical evidence about a central political institution and its relationship with their citizens by providing insights into how (and why) parliaments engage with the public through ICTs.

Methodological Contributions

The majority of studies in this field only provide a description of the usage and practices of parliaments and do not try to explain the causes and factors behind them. They only seek to provide an answer to the question of *how* and not to the question of *why*, which also has theoretical consequences. Even though it is important to assess and describe how parliaments are adapting to ICTs and the Internet, it is even more crucial to disclose the determinants behind parliaments' decisions for and strategies of providing public engagement opportunities. Hence, this research looks beyond the simple description and execute a casual explanation (even if it is exploratory) in order to understand the sources of online inequalities and disparities across different parliaments' and countries' frameworks, considering a set of technological, political and institutional factors.

A further problem is that the literature has shown that public engagement has several contested meanings. When discussing public engagement, it is important to acknowledge the complexities inherent to this highly contested concept (Firmstone and Coleman, 2015). First, public engagement can be understood as a process of informing rather than interacting with citizens. Second, it can be seen as consulting the public's views. Third – and more commonly alluded to than advocated – public engagement can be understood as a process of empowerment, whereby citizens move from being recipients of decisions to becoming partners in their production (Ibid). Hence, there is no common or consensual definition or even a framework for analysis. Different and heterogeneous meanings have been used, consequently resulting in different dimensions and indicators when measuring parliaments' supply of e-engagement. To tackle this issue, a multidimensional measurement tool that addresses and acknowledges the complexities and multidimensionality inherent to the public engagement

concept has been provided. Since there is no common and consensual definition or framework for analysis and since different and heterogeneous meanings have been used, a *multidimensional measure of e-engagement supply* based on a meta-analysis of previous coding frames that provides different angles of analysis and easily travels across different political systems and countries has been built. Its originality is based on its versatility, as it allows us to obtain an overview of parliaments' supply of online public engagement, and at the same time, it disentangles the different ways parliaments promote engagement, such as informing, communicating and promoting participation.

A third issue (which is not necessarily a problem, but it is a lacuna) is raised by the fact that most of the previous research only uses one research method (questionnaires, interviews or hard data), and does not employ data crossing and validation from different, complementary research methods, since most analyses are case studies. However, the complexity inherent to cross-national analyses makes it harder to reach reliable results than when considering a single country. Therefore, methodology issues appear to be even more important in studies where many countries are analysed. Thus, the combination of different quantitative and qualitative methods and techniques provide a better understanding of the research problems and the complex phenomena than a single approach (Creswell and Clark, 2007). Additionally, in a research study with a broader and more complex research problem, it is wise not to constrain it by using only one method. Therefore, this study is unique, since it combines several research methods: quantitative and qualitative research techniques are mixed to fully understand the phenomenon in the analysis. Furthermore, both the methods that are employed and the outputs that are generated (the e-engagement index and the construction of a dataset assembling cross-sectional data) can foster comparisons not only within the European context but also worldwide.

Geographical Contributions

Finally, an important lacuna is that the literature on this topic has been dominated by analyses of Anglo-Saxon countries, which consequently has had an impact on the type of studies developed on parliaments (Copeland and Patterson, 1997; Leston-Bandeira, 2007; Leston-Bandeira and Ward, 2008). There are also a few case studies on this topic (e.g. Italy, Portugal and Denmark) as well as comparative studies including other countries outside of the Anglo-Saxon context. The prevalence of single-country studies is not exclusive to this topic;

rather, it has been the rule in the legislative studies field (Copeland and Patterson, 1997). Single-country cases might provide rich analyses and explanations of legislative institutions and contribute greatly to understanding how those institutions work; nevertheless, generalisations about representative governments confined to one time and place have limited utility (Norton, 1996). This has been due to the difficulties inherent in the comparative study of legislatures given the scarcity of available data, the range of disparate sources and the lack of suitable resources (Ibid.). Cross-national research on parliamentary institutions 'is not easy, but analysing a number of such institutions using the same conceptual apparatus or research design will contribute mightily to addressing questions about political representation' (Copeland and Patterson, 1997: 3). To date, there are very few studies that look at parliaments' usage of new media from a comparative point of view beyond the Anglo-Saxon countries. The works of Pippa Norris (2001a), Trechsel et al., (2003), Setälä and Grönlund (2006) and Theiner et al. (2018) constitute the main exceptions to the lack of large comparative studies in the field. Nevertheless, with the exception of the latter, these studies need to be updated to understand the ways in which parliaments adapt to the Internet in light of the growing advances in the rapidly changing technological world.

Furthermore, the understanding of digital politics has been lagging behind its increasing prominence, given the 'US centric focus of most public discourse on Internet politics' (Vaccari, 2008: 5). The United States has thus far constituted the benchmark against which most politicians, journalists and citizens have assessed online political communication. Digital politics in the United States may provide a role model and serve as inspiration for political actors, professionals and institutions in other countries, but it does not seem to offer a reliable empirical guide to the actual development and outcome of online political communication across other democracies (Ibid). Therefore, it is important to move forward from this narrow and simplistic view of digital media and politics. Moving beyond this limitation is a necessary step in appreciating the role of context and of different types of incentives and constraints among political institutions such as parliaments.

Therefore, comparative research including a variety of cases in Europe and including cases that have been disregarded is utterly necessary. A large scope study allows the analysis of a series of research questions in ways that not been looked at in the past. Furthermore, including Central, Eastern and Southern European countries, which in the past have been neglected, provides a better and more complete picture of how European parliaments are using the Internet to engage citizens and offers the possibility to effectively test the influence of country-level

variables on parliaments' supply of e-engagement. Additionally, Portugal and Austria have not been at the centre stage of studies looking at the parliament-citizens relationship, with a few exceptions. A deep understanding of these two parliamentary institutions is much needed and contributes to enrich a field that continues, even today, to been dominated by analyses of Anglo-Saxon countries.

STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

This thesis is divided in three parts. Part I, *Theoretical and methodological basis of the thesis*, includes three chapters: 'Parliaments on the Web' (Chapter I), 'Research design' (Chapter II) and 'Defining and measuring online public engagement' (Chapter III). Chapter I focuses on the theoretical grounds of this research and the state of art. Chapter II introduces the research design of the thesis, the methods applied, data sources, advantages and drawbacks of the methodological approaches. Following that, in Chapter III, the main concept is presented, described and measured.

Part II, *Comparative Parliamentary website analysis – quantitative and qualitative aspects,* deals with the description of the phenomena being studied by answering the first research question and comprises two chapters. First, *'Establishing the phenomena: the supply of online public engagement in Europe*' (Chapter IV) presents a comprehensive analysis of quantitative data measuring PWs in terms of both content and delivery, while *'Substantive forms of online public engagement in Europe – qualitative aspects*' (Chapter V) supplements the quantitative results of the comparative website analysis by presenting vignettes of all substantive forms of public engagement with which parliaments are experimenting.

Part III, *Going beyond description,* devotes time to the second and third research questions and starts with '*Explaining cross-national differences: a fuzzy-set analysis'* (Chapter VI*),* which explores the causal conditions for the variation of online public engagement supply among the 21 parliaments. Next, *'A tale of two parliaments'* (Chapter VII), focuses on two case studies, Portugal and Austria, and dives into rival explanations and conditions that might refine the findings and the gaps left open by the comparative analysis concerning the variables that explain parliaments' supply on these matters. Additionally, this chapter looks at how these two parliaments have changed over the years since they started to realise the potential of ICT tools and began developing an online public engagement strategy, which critical actors are involved and the mechanisms and processes that are taking place.

PART ONE

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL BASIS OF THE PROJECT

CHAPTER I

PARLIAMENTS ON THE WEB

'The tasks of legislatures change with the times'
Samuel H. Beer (1990: 62)

This thesis is primarily concerned with describing and explaining the adoption of ICT by parliaments to engage with the public in the European context. This chapter introduces the theoretical framework and the state of the field by reviewing the most relevant literature to the question of online parliamentary public engagement and therefore of parliaments-citizens relationship. Therefore, this chapter profiles a few complementary strands of literature, which allow for the location of this thesis within the wider area of study.

The chapter is organized in two main sections. The first section (*theoretical framework*) has the goal of putting together a comprehensive theoretical scheme that accounts for parliament's adoption of ICTs in the context of representative democracies. This section outlines the key debates at the centre of digital politics and representative democracy, always with parliaments at the centre. From classical to new paradigms and stressing the multifunctional nature of parliaments, this part takes a closer look at the 'new role' of public engagement. Then, a systematic review of both the potentials and challenges brought in by ICTs to the relationship parliament-citizens is presented.

The second section (*state of the field)* provides an ample and detailed state of the art, compiling and discussing the evidence up to date of basically two decades of research on this topic. It presents the scholarship on parliaments' usage of ICTs and digital media, by systematically reviewing relevant comparative analyses, as well as case studies that have addressed the phenomena being studied in this thesis, including both theoretical and empirical contributions. This section features the first studies about parliaments and ICTs and the dilemmas this relationship encompasses, as well as most recent ones and their contributions. Finally, the main theoretical and empirical challenges within this research field are summarized, while proposing a new research agenda that takes the supply of online public engagement as a dependent variable.

1.1 Democracy and Citizens in the 21st Century: new models of democracy and new citizens' demands?

Over the last decades, citizens and political elites in advanced industrial democracies have displayed a 'growing willingness to question whether a fundamental commitment to the principles and institutions of representative democracy is sufficient to sustain the legitimacy and effectiveness' of democracies (Cain et al., 2003: 1). In many ways these concerns still echo to this day, as political leaders and public officials are adamant that representative democracy is facing a crisis (Zmerli and Van der Meer, 2016). This is often concomitant with increasing demands for political reforms that expand public access to politics in new ways, as well as restructure the process of democratic decision making. Such demands have consequently fuelled the discussion about participatory reforms of the process of representative democracy more generally and new institutional arrangements that could restore public confidence in democratic governments and cure democratic malaises (Dalton et al., 2001; Dalton, 2004; Zittel & Funchs, 2007; Norris, 2011; Fishkin and Mansbridge, 2017). The great recession that hit the West after 2007, in particular has eroded not only the trust in political institutions but also satisfaction with the way democracy functions (van der Meer, 2017).

Although electoral participation is generally in decline, participation is expanding into new forms of action (Cain et al., 2003). Citizens are embracing alternative forms of political expression and participation: they go to online and offline spaces to participate in the way they can and whenever they can. Society has changed and that, as a consequence, new modes of engagement have emerged (Faucher, 2014)[6]. This corroborates the logic that citizens are not 'anti-politics' but they are changing how and where they participate in politics (Dalton, 2013; Norris, 2011). This new informed and critical citizenry encompasses both politically disengaged citizens and highly participative ones (Leston-Bandeira, 2016). Besides, there is at least indirect evidence that perceptions of the citizens' role now emphasize a more participatory style and a greater willingness to challenge authority (Dalton, 2004). This is what Dalton presented as another consequence of the spreading distrust of politics and political institutions: 'a growing preference for direct democracy' (2004: 184), which in some cases can be enhanced by technological tools. The argument is the following: if political elites cannot be trusted, then

[6] For instance, while activities such as strikes and public meetings have become less popular, new parties, not-for-profit organisations and cause groups have experienced growing success lately (Faucher, 2014).

it is better to participate directly in the political process, avoiding the conventional political actors who are the traditional base of representative democracy. These trends suggest that the 'public's preferred mode of democratic decision making is moving toward new forms of more direct involvement in the political process' (Cain et al, 2003: 2).

Overall, the global picture seems to recall for the transformation of conventional institutions of representative democracies to integrate new spaces of political participation, many facilitated by the digital age (Allen and Light, 2015; Bennett and Sergerberg, 2012). A chorus of voices has been calling for democracies to reform and adapt to the changing political conditions and the changing public. This is not a new debate, but has been renewed by the potential brought in by ICTs. For instance, Benjamin's Barber's 'strong democracy' or Robert Dahl's discussion of transformative democratic reform both raise deeper questions about how democratic institutions can be improved to involve the public more directly. In particular, direct and deliberative democrats have devoted time to understand how to democratise the decision making processes by improving the quality of participation in the public sphere (Curato et al., 2017). These models arouse out of the concern that dominant aggregative conceptions of democracy, which focus on voting and elections, have become inadequate. Instead, other conceptions of democracy have been theorized and put in practice.

Cain et al.'s (2003) have shown extensive empirical evidence to demonstrate that there is pressure for political reform, which is often aimed at parliamentary institutions. This has already led to systematic reinforcement across advanced industrial democracies of new modes of democracy, namely advocacy democracy in which citizens directly participate in the process of policy formation or administration, although the final decisions are still made by elites. Other modes are the deliberative democracy, which emphasises the processes of democratic talk and collective opinion-formation (Chambers, 2003); and direct democracy, in which citizens participate in both the discussion and the deliberation about policies, and then make the final policy choice. Advocacy reforms are distinct from direct democracy reforms in that the final decision-taking powers are reserved to the parliamentary institution (Dalton et al., 2003). Modern-day calls for (more) direct-democratic procedures are commonly motivated by dissatisfaction with delegation or representation (Hawkins and Kaltwasser, 2018). Individuals who are dissatisfied with representative 'party democracy' (Caramani, 2017) have been shown to demand more opportunities that allow them to directly engage in the political process, thereby bypassing the ruling elite (Dalton, 2004; Pauwels, 2014).

Nevertheless, all three modes of democracy affect the relationship between parliament and citizens, 'either by questioning the representative legitimacy of the parliamentary institution, or more often by integrating citizen input into what used to be a purely political elite-driven process' (Leston-Bandeira, 2012c: 269). Moreover, the conceptual and theoretical work of Stephen Coleman on democracy in the Internet era, particularly his idea of 'direct representation' (Coleman, 2005) provides an interesting argument for how the participatory potential of ICTs could be harnessed by representative organizations and institutions. The premise is that it would be desirable to make use of digital ICTs to transcend the direct-representative dichotomy and to move towards a model of a digitally mediated 'direct representation' (Ibid.). This conceptualization recognizes the practical need (and relevance) for representation, given the limits of traditional direct democracy, but aims for a more intimate and discursive relationship between representative institutions and their constituents. This is a more tempered viewpoint that presents a compromise between direct and representative democracy (Papacharissi, 2010). In this model, there is a shared responsibility between elites and citizens and an escape from the current disconnection between representatives and constituents, while at the same time not overwhelming citizens with high demands of time and capacity to constantly be directly involved in politics (Coleman, 2005). For Coleman, just as the myth of the technologically facilitated agora has been a distraction (mainly advocated by cyber-optimists), the assumption that 'indirect representation is also an inevitability has served to constrain imaginative efforts to more closely link the act of representing to the needs and desires of the represented' (Ibid.: 211).

Following the same logic, there might be room for other perspectives and manoeuvre to transcend the direct-representation axis. For instance, Chambers brings in an interesting alternative perspective, which sheds a new light to this issue. The author stresses that deliberation is part of any democratic order and 'the question is really about what weight and significance, both theoretical and practical, one gives to deliberation' in a representative democracy, therefore the question 'is really one of balance and mix' between these dimensions (2012: 53).[7] Likewise, Saward (2001, 2010) has shown that different models of democracy (e.g. deliberative, direct, participatory, representative) should not be seen as separate and opposing systems. In many cases, the relationship between these types of democracy is often one in which institutions of new forms of democracy supplement (and sometimes supplant) the

[7] The author focuses only on deliberative democracy and its relationship with representative democracy (and mass democracy). However, we believe the same presumption can be made for participatory democracy.

large-scale traditional institutions of representative democracy (parties, elections, and legislatures) or augment (and improve) the legitimacy and accountability of pre-existing representative institutions (Chambers, 2012).

Moving beyond the classical representative vs. direct democracy axis allows us to concentrate on the capacity of political institutions to adapt to the consequences of digital interactivity within the framework of representative democracy (Blumler and Coleman, 2001; Coleman, 2005, b; Zittel, 2003; Chen, 2002; Hilbert 2009). A wide range of politicians and policymakers has given thought to ways of exploiting new forms of mediation, in order to strengthen the claim of parliaments to speak for, and with, the public they represent (Coleman, 2006). The expansion of new modes of democracy does not question the significance of the elective chain as key for ensuring political legitimacy, but they do indicate that 'we need to widen our understanding of representation, parliament and democracy, if we are to fully grasp the role of the modern parliament and public engagement' (Leston-Bandeira, 2016: 7).

While the practicality, consequences and costs of such institutional reforms are still under debate, it is clear that the pressure for new forms of direct democracy, or at least for some forms of deliberative and advocacy democracy, is building upon the public's growing scepticism about conventional politics (Coleman, 2005). At the centre of that pressure are parliaments, which face increasingly challenging public expectations towards the way they interact with citizens in the 21st century (Leston-Bandeira, 2016). Consequently, in the last few decades, democratic regimes have witnessed an expansion of participatory innovations and other instruments for engaging with the public (Avritzer, 2002; Delwit et al., 2006; Font et al., 2014; Fung and Wright, 2003; Geiβel and Newton, 2012; Pateman, 2012; Sirianni and Friedland, 2001). Some of them are enhanced by changes and developments in technology and communications environments, given their increasing relevance in today's societies (Cain et al., 2003).

1.1.1 Parliament beyond its traditional roles

Since at least the seventeenth century, political and constitutional theorists have advanced two propositions that formed the basis of a significant part of the literature on legislatures. The first is that the principal task of legislatures is that of law-making. The second proposition concerns the nature of the legislature best suited to law-making.

The identification of legislatures as law-making bodies distinct from the executive body that implements such laws was central to the works of both Locke and Montesquieu. The

legislature, declared Locke, 'is no otherwise legislative of the society but by the right it has to make laws for all the parts and for every member of society, prescribing rules to their actions, and giving power of execution where they are transgressed' (Locke, [1955] 2002: 69). For both authors, it was the very task that gave them their name and justified their very existence. As Norton (1990: 2) explains this 'corresponds to a restrictive paradigm established since at least the seventh century based on the principle that the main task of a parliament is that of 'law-making' or 'law giving'. As Beer puts it, 'one of the oldest conceptions of the role of Parliament is that of controlling and restraining the executive' (1990: 71).

Hence, most literature on European parliaments is a literature on legislators (Green-Pedersen, 2005). Major volumes on parliaments in Europe (Döring, 1995 and Döring and Halleberg, 2004) focus almost exclusively on legislative behaviour and how this is affected by agenda-setting rules and procedures in parliament, while other (non-legislative) activities have received little attention in the same volumes (e.g. Wiberg, 1995).

Since the 1960's and 1970's, the literature has extended the understanding of the functions of legislatures beyond that of policy making (or policy influencing) on behalf of the political community. Beer (1966) and Packenham (1970) have focused their attention not on the relationship between the legislature to the executive but on the relationship of the legislature with the political community. Packenham's (1970) work is especially valuable for identifying the importance of legislatures as bodies that are multi-functional and showing that parliaments do not have necessarily a decisional policy making role. Drawing on the analysis of the Brazilian legislature, the author identifies eleven functions, including for instance the latent legitimation of the political system, conflict resolution and administrative oversight. Beer (1966) has drawn attention to the significance of the function of legislatures in mobilizing consent for particular programmes of public policy consent mobilization. In this respect, Mezey's (1979) work is also useful in providing a broad analytic framework and taking us beyond an exclusive focus on policy making, which has proved especially valuable in identifying a rich field for enquiry.

These scholars moved the focus away from the narrow confines of the relationship of legislature to executive. The result has been a 'paradigm change that sees legislatures as more than mono-functional bodies' (Dios, 2014). This new paradigmatic approach considers that legislatures variously fulfil significant regime-support functions. However, even in this new paradigm, 'the executive-legislative relations remains relevant and writings on the topic have been extensive' (Ibid.: 4). For instance, the common denominator – the central, albeit not the

sole criterion – in established taxonomies of legislatures, such as Mezey's (1979) and Polsby's (1975) typologies, has been the degree to which they can exert policy power independent of the executive (Green-Pedersen, 2005)[8].

Even though some scholars have highlighted the existence of other roles of legislatures besides the traditional functions of legislation, scrutiny, and representation, scholarship on parliaments has focused mostly on the functions of legislation and scrutiny (e.g. Olson, 1994) or has emphasised the relationships between parliaments, parties (Bowler et al., 1999) and/or the executive (Norton, 2005). Consequently, the parliament-citizen relationship has been neglected in the more established literature on legislatures (Ibid.).

For a long time, the closest the legislative studies came to studying the relationship with citizens was through research that focused on representation – specially the extent to which parliamentarians reflect the interests of citizens (e.g. Sapiro, 1981), their style and focus of representation (e.g. Eulau and Wahlke, 1978), or even their demographic and socio-economic characteristics (e.g. Best and Cotta, 2000). Although touching upon a clear link in the relationship between parliament and citizens, these studies tend to concentrate mainly on the parliamentarian as a unit of analysis. Besides, they do not necessarily address the mechanisms that the public has at its disposal to input directly into parliamentary matters or the consequences that parliaments may have on public perceptions. Also, their premise is based on the principal-agent relationship between citizens and their representatives, which institutionalises a 'political division of labour between principal and agent at the moment of electoral decision and thereafter propagates periodized (until the next election) self-exclusion by citizens from public policy decision-making' (Judge, 2014:135). In such account, the period between elections is 'something akin to a participatory black hole' characterized by a 'participatory void' for citizens (Ibid.: 135). This conceptualization of parliamentary representation predominantly linked to a key moment of elections is insufficient 'to understand the complexity of parliament's representative role in the 21st century and in particular how public engagement fits with this' (Leston-Bandeira, 2016).

Parliamentary representation beyond elections

Representation is a process of making, accepting, or rejecting representative claims (Disch, 2015; Saward, 2014). This ground-breaking insight challenged the standard assumption

[8] King's (1976) famous classification of parliaments is also based on this variable.

that representative democracy can be reduced to elections and activities of elected representatives (Pitkin, 1967). Therefore, this insight has broadened the scope of representative democracy to encompass representation activities beyond those authorized by elections. In fact, dissatisfaction with the electoral representation led to calls for rethinking it and emphasise 'continuums of influence and power created by moments in which citizens can use the vote to select and judge representatives', but also to structure 'ongoing processes of action and reaction between [representative] institution' (Urbinati and Warren, 2008: 402). The once isolated importance of elections has waned considerably. This is not because elections do not matter - casting ballots is the basic form of participation - but simply because of the expansion of the many alternative forms of political participation in democracies that take place between elections.

As seen initially in this chapter, the past decades have been characterized by increasing demands for political reforms to expand public access to politics in new ways, as well as to restructure the process of democratic decision making (Cain et al., 2003). The expansion of new citizens' demands, and more inclusive modes of democracy illustrate how conceptualising representation only around the elective chain increasingly misses out a considerable part of modern politics. This does not question the significance of representative democracy, but suggests the need to widen the understanding of representation, parliament and democracy, in order to comprehend parliaments nowadays.

In a context where the primacy of representative legitimacy is increasingly questioned (Norris, 2011; Fung and Wright, 2003; Rosenberg, 2007; Smith, 2009), parliaments have expended the opportunities for parliamentary public engagement, to 'a point that it can now be equated to the other more traditional roles played by parliament' (Leston-Bandeira, 2014: 417).

The role of public engagement in the new millenium

The actual relationship with citizens tends only to be addressed as an indirect outcome of the other core functions of parliament or as a consequence of a parliament's relationship with the government and/or parties (Leston-Bandeira, 2012c). The public engagement of citizens has been addressed by other political science sub-disciplines, such as electoral behaviour and public opinion; however, the topic is mostly ignored by the legislative studies discipline, with a few exceptions arising in the new millennium, such as studies on legislative petitions systems (for example, Carman, 2010), general public engagement (Kelso, 2007; Leston-Bandeira, 2016), parliamentary outreach (Clark and Wilford, 2012) and Norton's 2002

edition dedicated to the relationship between parliaments and citizens. The 2000's saw an increase in literature on the specifics of the relationship between parliament and citizens and on new forms of parliamentary interaction with citizens, such as the parliamentary e-petition system or online legislative consultation and MPs' exercise of new ICT tools, etc. (Coleman 2004; Norton 2007; Lindh & Miles 2007; Carman 2010; Linder 2011, etc.) Leston-Bandeira stated that it was the 'dual development of a reinforcement of the discourse on political disengagement and an expansion of alternative forms of participatory democracy' (2013: 4) that shifted the focus to the relationship between parliament and citizens.

Parliamentary reforms and new strategies of public engagement practices have attracted scholarly interest. For instance, the Hansard Society and the Inter-parliamentary Union have published several policy reports analysing new features of 'parliamentary representation' in the contexts of 21st century democracy. Although they are relevant, it is important to acknowledge these policy reports are practical documents in their nature – therefore, they lack a robust theoretical examination of the issues (Seo, 2017). Nevertheless, a significant step forward was made by the special issue of Journal of Legislative Studies published in 2012 because it full academic treatment to the relationship between legislatures and citizens.

Since then the relationship between parliaments and citizens have gained much more attention. For instance, recent reports by the Global Centre for ICT (2016) show that public engagement has become a key driver for parliaments' agendas, with considerable resources currently being dedicated to the expansion of the services and activities supporting this new parliamentary role involving ICTs (Ibid.). This is expressed in a number of ways already reported in the literature, such as the establishment of public information services (Laundy, 1989), the implementation of services specific to the delivery of public engagement activities; the investment in new staff and financial resources focused on communication and engagement; the development of activities to raise awareness and understanding of parliamentary business, roles, and significance; and the creation or strengthening of processes that integrate citizens' voices into the decision making process, such as petition systems (Leston-Bandeira, 2016). Therefore, it is safe to say that since the beginning of the 21st century, 'public engagement has expanded almost to the point of developing into a 'new parliamentary role'' (Leston-Bandeira, 2014: 417). This does not mean legislation, scrutiny and representation are no longer key functions of parliament, instead, besides these still key roles legislatures are nowadays expected to actively reach out to the public.

The development of this new role is founded on the symbolic representation ideas, whereby the public is encouraged to relate to parliament as a key democratic institution, rather than as an institution of politics (Ibid.). This allows the public to relate with the institution beyond politics. Either because most public engagement is implemented by parliamentary non-political officials or because of the activities' inherent purpose, much of parliamentary public engagement is, therefore, an expression of symbolic representation values (Ibid.). Leston-Bandeira has argued for refocusing on 'symbolic representation' (Pitkin, 1972) or 'representation as identification' (Viera and Runciman, 2008), which is not just about 'acting for the interests of the represented', but about 'establishing connections' between citizens and representatives through identifying common identities. Therefore, through public engagement, citizens may not only be educated and informed about parliamentary affairs, but may also develop a sense of ownership of the institution. For this purpose, digital media can be extremely useful, by collapsing of traditional constraints of distance (Coleman, 2005) and connecting parliaments more directly to citizens (Setälä and Gronlund, 2006). Additionally, this concept of 'representation as connection' would enable us to understand better the 'complexity' of the relationship between parliament and citizens.

The relationship between parliament and citizens seems to have gained considerably more visibility over the last decade, thanks to the opportunities brought in by the development of new media. Even though the adoption of a new role is still a slow process for many legislatures, some parliaments across the world have undergone significant reforms over the last few years not only by taking advantage of ICTs, Internet channels, and tools, but also by supporting a deeper public engagement with parliament (Leston-Bandeira, 2016). This trend is also shown at the parliamentarian level. Many parliamentarians have started to develop Web presences, by establishing individual websites and social media profiles. In recent years, researchers observed that politicians have started to use social media more interactively than they did in the past (Tromble, 2018).

Nevertheless, parliament's unique characteristics as an institution makes it particularly difficult for the development of connections with citizens (Leston-Bandeira, 2014). As pointed out by Hedlund already back in 1984, 'the nature of the legislative organisation and its difficulties in projecting a dynamic and active image have weakened it in the public's eyes' (Ibid: 357). Of course, in the *age of information*, 'those difficulties are considerably amplified' (Leston-Bandeira, 2014: 420). Hence, ICTs can play a role in developing connections with

citizens, by providing some solutions and tools; but of course, they also bring many challenges and no easy solutions.

The pace and direction towards institutional change

Until recently, the field of legislature studies has had trouble catching up with the changes that parliaments have undergone in the past two centuries, which resulted in a neglected portrait of the relationship between the institution and citizens. Parliaments have changed into modern legislatures that operate in a completely different environment compared to the 19th and 20th centuries, following transformations in governance and society, Inevitably, this has consequences for how legislatures engage with the public (Leston-Bandeira, 2016). The modern and contemporary parliaments or the 'Mediator Parliament', as Leston-Bandeira calls them, are now 'expected to actively reach out to the public' (Ibid.: 5), besides performing the traditional functions described above.

The story of how the 'Mediator Parliament' emerges in the 21st century and adapts to a new completely different context, shaped by the increasingly role played by Internet, ICTs and digital media in today's world, is in fact a story of 'institutional change' and how institutions change and preserve themselves over time.

Although parliaments, as central political institutions of democratic regimes, could be expected to be conservative forces resisting changes. Yet, there is evidence as shown above that parliaments do in fact change. Sometimes they do so gradually through incremental steps and other times through sweeping reconstitution and transformation of character and purpose (Longley, 1996). Although abrupt and radical institutional change is possible (Krasner, 1984), it is normally followed by long periods of stability or incremental change marked by small, timid steps which conform to a broader pattern. Therefore, while this is still a slow process for many legislatures, parliamentary practices and roles have changed over time, enhanced by taking advantage of the opportunities brought on by the new millennium. This is so because 'the self-reinforcing feedback mechanisms that support path dependent processes make it difficult for organizations to explore alternative options' (Powell, 1991: 197). Indeed, as Krasner (1984: 240) notes, 'institutions generated by functional demands of the past can perpetuate themselves into a future whose functional imperatives are radically different'.

Comparative analysis of parliaments' approach to citizens mediated by digital media reveal significant differences between them. These differences are rooted in historical and institutional factors. Institutions are shaped in large part by their political environments and

past historical experience, which they embed 'into rules, routines and forms that persist beyond the historical moment and condition' (March and Olsen, 1989: 167).

Institutions preserve themselves not only by resisting some forms of change, but also by developing their own criteria for the definition of appropriate and successful action (Ibid.). Parliaments possess a stock of responses (institutional repertoires) that serve as the primary source of routine responses whenever there is a perceived need for change, namely the changes in the social morphology of our societies (Castells, 1996). Thus, adaptation is the main pattern that emerges from these incremental processes. Institutions evolve through a process of 'experiential learning' based on trial and error, whereby appropriate responses are selected based on standard operating procedures, rules and norms linking roles and situations (Dimitrakopoulos, 2001). Therefore, over time and through some degree of trial and error, parliaments will choose the 'best' technological offerings to achieve a desirable outcome.

Also, the direction of institutional change is usually 'path dependent', i.e. past events and foregoing decisions are important to explain current and future action or decisions. Path dependence 'implies at the very least a sequence of events narrowing the scope of action eventually resulting in a state of persistence or inertia' (Schreyögg and Sydow, 2010: 4). Therefore, previous choices either increase the cost of new strategies or preclude them altogether (Krasner, 1984). This bears the hallmarks of history, since past choices affect future developments. More importantly, the mere existence of institutions creates a set of expectations that render specific courses of action more appropriate than others. Thus, even when there are calls for parliaments to change, these are assessed based on conceptions and images of 'appropriate action', which in turn are shaped by a longer-lasting historically defined process.

To sum up, technological change creates new challenges and opportunities for parliaments, but the response to those challenges depends on history, culture, institutions, and paths already taken (Nye, 2002).

Institutional theory[9], in its various forms, offers interesting insights regarding the pace and the direction of institutional change, construed here as change in 'formal structure, organizational culture and goals, programme or mission' (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991: 81). How, then, did the European Parliaments respond to the challenge of a wired and network society[10], where its representative legitimacy is increasingly questioned? Did they innovate or

[9] See Chapter II to a detail presentation of the theoretical approach used in this thesis.

[10] The term network society was coined by Castells (1996) and the term wired society coined by Martin (1978) indicating a society that is connected by mass- and telecommunication networks.

was their response a product of path dependence or even a product of costs-benefits calculations? When change occurred, what shaped it? Hence, the question then arises as to how parliamentary institutions change.

1.1.2 The potential of Internet in the 'information era'

Normalization vs Equalization theories

Before introducing the potential brought in by internet and digital media for parliaments and their relationship with citizens, one needs to discuss two dominant and distinct theoretical paths, which describe the Internet's political impact: the equalization theory and the normalization theory (e.g. Bimber and Davis, 2003; Gibson et al., 2003; Margolis and Resnick, 2000). On one hand, there are the normalizers or cyber-sceptics (the normalization theory), who claim that current political relationships and power distributions will ultimately be replicated online and on the other hand, there are the cyber-optimists (the equalization theory), who claim that the Internet will reform politics and radically redistribute political power. This descends from a much older debate between sociological and technological determinisms: 'between those who claim that the impact of technology is shaped by social and political institutions and, contrary, those who believe technology has the power to shape society and politics' (Anstead and Chadwick, 2009: 58).

The cyber-optimists believe the advent of technology and new media brought emerging and affordable opportunities to make representative institutions more transparent, accessible and open to interactive discussion (Coleman, 2006). They regard digital technologies as perhaps the most important development in our lifetimes that can potentially fuel this process (Norris, 2001a). Therefore, the technological development could lead the way on how parliaments engage more effectively with the public and improve the way they work: to become more genuinely representative of their electorates, more accessible and accountable to them, more open and transparent in their procedures, and more effective in their key tasks of legislation and oversight of government. In all these ways, 'the Internet offers to reconnect people to the political process and revive flagging civic energies' (Ibid.: 98). The Internet lowers the costs of publishing large-scale information and multimedia via political websites. It also provides senders of political messages with the ability to maintain control of the conveyed message without media intermediation and editorial intervention (e.g. Carlson and Djupsund,

2001; Coleman and Goetze, 2002; Hill and Hughes, 1998; Margolis et al., 2003). These features provide potential benefits to all political actors: individual representatives, party groups, and the parliament collectively.

Anstead and Chadwick (2009) point out an important distinction to be made between different types of optimists: the *representative democracy optimists* and the *direct democracy optimists*. The first ones do not argue that the Internet will destroy all representative institutions, but instead claims that it has the potential to reform and rehabilitate indirect vehicles of democratic participation within the frame of representative democracy (Trippi, 2004). As Wright (2012: 253) suggests: 'The significant power still rests with elected representatives, but that new technology can help to create stronger representative democracy'. While, the second ones claim that internet will actually undermine representative political institutions and may be able to actually recreate the Greek agora in the form of virtual agora (Morris, 1999).

More pessimistic prognostications suggest that the Internet will even widen the gap between the engaged and the apathetic (Margolis and Resnick, 2000). For cyber-sceptics current political relationships and power distributions will ultimately be replicated online. This so-called normalization thesis contends that contrary to predictions that the Internet would revolutionize our everyday lives, the expansion of the Web has done little more than provide a new medium through which established patterns in all aspects of social life '[…] will predominate in cyberspace' (Ibid.: 73). For cyber-sceptics, politics on the Net are largely a replication – 'a mirror image' – of politics in the real world. Rather than the Internet transforming politics, they claim the impact of politics has largely shaped and harnessed the Internet to do its bidding (Margolis and Moreno-Riaño, 2009). Therefore, Internet will fail to upset established power structures (Hill and Hughes, 1998; Norris, 2003; Margolis and Resnick 2000).

Cyber-sceptics claim that digitalized political institutions do not live up to the standard of electronic democracy and thus represent examples of technological modernization rather than actual political transformation (Zittel, 2003). This means that parliamentary websites (PWs) can be expected to reinforce support for the dominant political attitudes and established political actors rather than to transform current systems of interest representation (Margolis and Resnick, 2000). Other contemporary scholars of online politics, such as Bimber and Davis (2003), and W. L. Benoit et al. (2003), offer a similar interpretation: Internet is changing politics far less than many expected. Additionally, some scholars studying digital parliaments

have been for a long time voicing concern about the suboptimal uses of the Internet in many parliaments (Coleman et al., 1999).

These two theories have been criticized in several grounds. First, the results have been mixed and no consensus has been delivered (Boulianne, 2009). However, literature increasingly points to the conclusion of a positive but small impact of Internet use on engagement (Ibid.). Even studies that support the proposition that the Internet equalizes access and increases political participation are inconsistent across years, and show an effect that is often small in magnitude (Bimber and Copeland, 2013). Second, both sides have generally paid insufficient attention to the complex interaction between technology and political institutions. Institutions have often been neglected by the normalizers and the optimists (Anstead and Chadwick, 2010). Third, several scholars have questioned the plausibility of these rigid visions concerning Internet politics (e.g. Foot and Schneider, 2002; Norris, 2001b; 2003). They have argued that a middle-ground position regarding the Internet's impact on political life is more appropriate; even if the Internet is not bringing about major changes, it could nonetheless be regarded as having some impact on political life (Norris 2001b; 2003).

Nevertheless, this thesis does not wish to contribute to the discussion about whether the Internet and ICTs are villains or heroes in the democratic process. This polarized view that either everything will change as direct democracy on the Internet comes to replace representative governance, or alternatively that nothing will change as the digital world merely replicates the offline context are rejected. Therefore, this thesis follows a recent wave of literature that has been seeking to rethink this discussion. There is now a realization that 'understanding the influence of the Internet upon democratic politics requires that we assign to the Internet neither the role of history maker nor the role of a passive technological entity' (Margolis and Moreno-Riaño, 2009: 150). Scott Wright (2012: 253), in particular, has argued that researchers should abandon such polarized approaches and be sensitive to the possibility of hybrid 'normalized revolutions,' where 'new technologies create deeply significant, perhaps wholesale changes to the function of established political institutions without overthrowing those institutions'. Therefore, much of the research has moved past the equalization vs normalization debate to focus more on the mechanisms of change. Recent findings have contradicted the universalism that characterizes cyber-optimism, as well as cyber-scepticism, and point towards the importance of political context in the process of political change in the networked society (Zittel, 2003; Schwanholz et al., 2018).

What follows from this debate is the need to empirically explore whether parliaments continue to use ICTs according to a monological model, focusing mainly on providing information to the public, or according to a more interactive model, opening up opportunities for two-way communication and participation at multiple levels, which create the conditions for citizens to exert influence over the parliamentary activity (Triga and Milioni, 2014).

The potential for the relationship of Parliaments-Citizens

The potential of the Internet to strengthen public engagement with politics has been widely debated. In the context of serious levels of political distrust and political disengagement (Dalton, 2004), the new media have often been identified as crucial means for addressing the current challenges arising in representative democracies (see, for example, Coleman and Blumler, 2009). In the context of the relationship between parliament and citizens, the new media have the potential to create new relationships and to considerably strengthen those that already exist. ICT provides direct channels of communication between representatives and the represented, as well as the means to make a substantial amount of information available to citizens and to simultaneously integrate the public's views into the decision-making process (Griffith and Leston-Bandeira, 2012). Additionally, 'the potential offered to parliaments by the Internet and other ICT is colossal in terms of enhancing this institution's work and image' (Leston-Bandeira, 2007).

As Norris stated back in 2001, communication and information, key elements of new media, provide essential functions that 'reflect the classical liberal notion of the role of parliament in representative democracy' (Norris, 2001a: 137). In turn, these will provide the mechanics for the process of accountability between represented and representatives.

Digital technologies have facilitated the growth of relationships of mediated co-presence, leading to a shrinkage of social space and the collapse of traditional constraints of distance (Coleman, 2005). New media can, therefore, be a powerful tool in the relationship between parliament and citizens. Furthermore, the advent of social media, in particular, can considerably enhance the capacity for communication and input from citizens. First, at a very basic level, new media can give visibility to parliaments, something not to be disregarded, especially in political systems where the distance between parliament and citizens may be particularly acute. Even in well-established democracies, Setälä and Grönlund (2006) show that PWs have the potential to make decision making more publicly visible. Furthermore, at a

higher level, new media if used in a creative, strategic and smart way, can connect parliaments more directly to citizens, promote transparency by disseminating information, provide safe spaces for political discussion and engagement (Ibid.). Hence, the potential is essentially threefold:

- Dissemination of information;
- Communication possibilities;
- Integrating citizens in the policy-decision making process

Furthermore, the advent of ICTs can considerably enhance the capacity to internally manage great volumes of complex information. Parliaments respond and act for different internal audiences (parties/MPs, administrative bodies), for which digital media can help parliaments to deliver their tasks, such as organizing information and knowledge resources to support the work of MPs (Mulder, 1999). Specifically, ICTs can significantly improve content management (e.g. the production, storage and dissemination of documents) as well as the process of parliamentary activities (e.g. the organization and coordination of commission meetings, etc.). Therefore, parliaments can take advantage of these tools to modernize internal processes, manage information archives, and introduce internal simplification and efficiency (Sobaci, 2010; Romanelli, 2016). For instance, email services and intranet facilitate communication, and are faster and cheaper than internal paper mail (Norton, 2008). Consequently, they facilitate a greater volume of contact among parliamentarians, staff and between each other, increasing ultimately the efficiency of parliamentary business.

Dissemination and provision of information

Information and communication technologies have been viewed as means of facilitating the electronic access to official documents and political information (Poland, 2001). Information can be distributed and retrieved easily and quickly, allowing people to coordinate without sharing the same physical space, as they can access the relevant data regardless of their location. Citizens leading busy lives may want to access information at their own convenience (Earl and Kimport, 2011). Ultimately, the internet reduces the costs of organizing and participating in political activities and enhances the transparency of the political process and the quality of opinion formation leading to greater political involvement of citizens (Treschel et al., 2003).

Furthermore, the digital media can also be used to provide personalized information. This is a key characteristic of new media - the capacity to narrowcast. Whereas broadcasters try to talk to 'everyone', the Internet can also be used in a narrowcast model to target smaller communities and even individuals. In fact, the 2005 report from Hansard Society advices that '[the UK] parliament should move towards providing personalized information on demand to those who want it*'* (Hansard Society, 2005: 52-53). This means using tools such as Email and alerts to inform those with an interest in particular issues and policies – or the activities of their own MP or party.

The possibility to use personalized information is an important tool for parliaments to become more accessible and connect with citizens, which does not only mean provide amounts of general and specific information on several issues, but and more importantly, ensure that people get to find out about what they are interested in and what affects them. Some actual existing techniques of online narrowcast include for instance email newsletters, premium content, members-only networks, social media mullets, RSS-only articles, user-generated news. Additionally, some of these tools might be relevant for parliaments internal management. For instance, members-only networks might be especially relevant for internal management of parliaments – giving MPs (the members) custom webpages of content.

Parliaments as information-driven and knowledge-based organizations can embrace new information and communication technologies for informing the public, as well as producing and sharing knowledge at a larger scale (Romanelli, 2016).

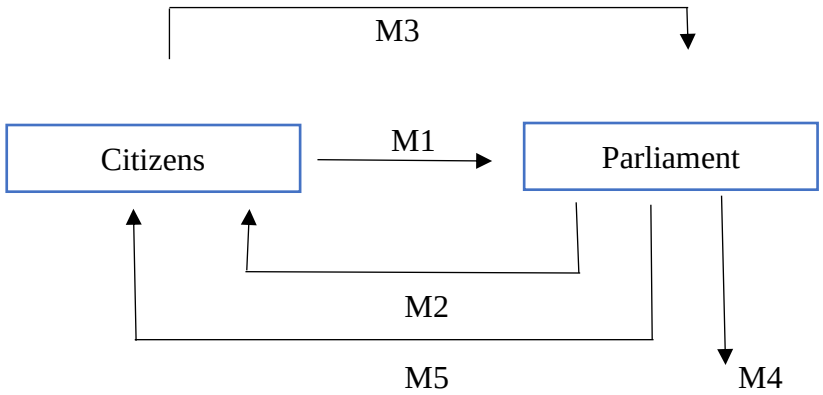
Communication possibilities: interacting with citizens

An important feature of digital ICT is the possibility to obtain feedback and promote political interactivity (both bilateral and multilateral). The Internet allows people to communicate virtually and to talk back - this feature is the core of the culture of Internet (Chadwick and Howard, 2010). Internet is facilitating new and dispersed networks of peer-to-peer interaction. In fact, no information source before the Internet provided such scope for direct responsiveness.

At a macro level, Hacker (2000) notes that political interactivity allows citizens to 'interact, discuss, debate, and argue about political matters'. It is a multi-directional dialogue that requires at least two lines of interaction (Ibid.), with the goal of 'co-creation of political perceptions and policies' and making possible for citizens and political officials to 'work

together to ask questions, find answers and formulate policies and actions' (Ibid.). These actions may contribute to the psychological feeling of being civically and politically engaged. Hacker has formulated a basic model of political interactivity between the government and citizens that can be useful to understand the communication flows the Internet opens up between institutions and citizens overall, and between parliaments and citizens in particular.

Figure 1.0.1 Hacker's model of political interactivity adapted to parliaments



Source: Adapted from Hacker (2000)

Hacker's work has been especially valuable for identifying multiple flows of communication, even if some do not necessarily result in a particular action. These include messages from citizens to the parliament (M1) and from the parliament as an output and feedback to the citizen (M2); this feedback connection from the parliament to the citizen is a personalized response. The quality of the M2 link is likely to determine how much further the process of political interactivity will go. If quality meets the information needs or expectations of the initiation (citizen), the citizen will most likely evaluate the response as adequate or inadequate and respond to the parliament message (M3). The parliament may react to this second citizen message with either political action (M4) or an explanation of why particular action cannot be taken (M5-inaction). While more messages may be exchanged, this five-step flow of interaction constitutes a basic working model illustrating the possible communication and interactive flows between parliaments and citizens. Hacker argues that this model relates citizen input to parliaments' outputs in a way that truly empowers the citizen and does not simply provide a rhetorical response to the first request, comment or demand.

Hacker's model is especially relevant to understand the potential of digital media for vertical political interactivity, i.e. between people and political elites or institutions, in this case between the people and parliament. However, digital media also might be relevant for institutions, such as parliament, to enhance and promote horizontal communication (multilateral communication) – among multiple individuals (Stromer-Galley, 2004). Hence, potential linkages between parliaments and citizens can take either a bilateral form, such as by using email, for instance, or be multilateral, involving many actors, such as in online chat rooms (Römmele, 2003).

Especially, Web 2.0[11] tolls encourage more interaction and dialogue between the host of a website and its visitors. These tools lower the barriers to participation, making it easier for users to respond to the content created by the host (Birdsall, 2007). This suggests that when previously parliaments and politicians have used the Internet solely as a one-way top-down channel, nowadays they could now also use the Internet to interact with citizens and encourage communication (bilateral and multilateral) during the legislature. In the age of Web 2.0 tools, Hackers' model is even more dynamic and interactive, with possible multiple channels and flows of information and communication. By moving from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0, political institutions can transcend some of the traditional barriers of distance and time which have prevented citizens from having a more direct and communicative relationship with their representatives (Coleman, 2006). Parliamentary communication is not just a matter of enabling 'outsiders' to see what is going on in Parliament, but also about using communication technology to make possible better models of 'knowledge exchange' between the work of Parliament and wider social networks (Hansard Society, 2005).

Integrating citizens in the policy decision making process

Another potential of the Internet is the possibility to consult citizens' views and integrate citizens' inputs in the policy making process. Digital media has the potential to actively involve citizens in public affairs, and therefore, producing the so desirable checks and balances (Grönlund, 2003). Parliaments could adopt technology to lead citizens to participate and be involved in decision making processes by promoting active and democratic citizenship,

11 The term Web 2.0, coined in 2005 by O'Reilly stresses that Internet can be interactive, participatory and potentially bottom-up.

coherent with forms of a deliberative or advocacy democracy (Åstrom, 2001; Päivärinta and Sæbø, 2006). The new media allows individuals to provide meaningful input to the political process of developing policies that can legitimize a program or a policy, its purposes, implementation and leadership (Milakovich, 2010). Some Internet features, such as interaction, horizontal communication structure, and fairly low cost, can support the integration of citizens in parliamentary affairs and consequently in the decision making process (Barber, et al., 1997; Romanelli, 2016).

There has been increasing evidence that new technologies are becoming an opportunity for citizens to exert influence on policy making (Grönlund, 2003; Romanelli, 2016). ICTs help encourage participation for improving the efficiency, acceptance and legitimacy of democratic and consultative processes by legitimizing an efficient decision-making process (Sæbø et al., 2008; Luehrs and Molinari, 2010). Policy processes can be constructed to be interactive and collaborative processes by consultation, dialogue and confrontation (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2000), by which public institutions, such as parliaments, interact with citizens and people become involved with an active role and contribution. For instance, Coleman has devoted a lot of time studying parliaments' online consultations with members of the public. In his view, online consultations can offer knowledge or experience relevant to particular areas of policy or legislation. Coleman results show the responses to online consultations have been overwhelmingly positive and the majority of participants were not 'the usual suspects': party members, lobbyists or people who lived in or around the Westminster village. Contrary to the criticism frequently made to online consultation regarding the participations, Coleman works has shown that in many cases the voices heard in these consultation forums would probably not otherwise have been heard by parliamentarians.

Nevertheless, sustaining active participation of citizens in the decision making process will depend on both politicians and citizens willing to experience and implement new channels of communication (Cardoso et al., 2006).

'There is no such thing as a free lunch': challenges brought in by Internet

Something that we have learned from the debate between cyber-optimists and cyber-pessimists is that Internet and ICTs have created new opportunities, but also new challenges, politically but also organisationally, and both should be taken into account in any study looking at how institutions are using these tools. Especially, when studying parliaments,

given that 'new media brings many challenges and no easy solutions, in particular for parliaments' (Griffith and Leston-Bandeira, 2012).

As mentioned earlier the relationship between parliament and citizens acts through three different channels: individual representatives, party groups, and parliament as an institution. Therefore, the potential and use of the new media 'vary among each of these political actors' (Ibid.: 498). Due to its characteristic, the institution of parliament faces more difficulties in adopting new media, in comparison to individual representatives or party groups (Ibid.). Parliaments have the dual responsibility of providing a space for political conflict resolution and decision making, as well of upholding the values of representative democracy at the same time. Additionally, parliaments have to keep an impartial and apolitical posture whilst conveying political content. What is more, parliaments have complex and slow processes, making it difficult to keep up with fast-changing technology. Individual representatives and party groups often have greater flexibility in adopting new media, and indeed many have come to the point of developing new forms of constituency relationships specific to online communication (Francoli and Ward, 2008).

Additionally, new media can increase parliaments' visibility to the public (IPU, 2010; Coleman, 2010, Leston-Bandeira, 2014), which can be a challenge in many different ways. For instance, Thompson (2000) has shown, this increased visibility and exposition leads to added challenges to maintain legitimacy, particularly for parliaments facing, nowadays, contested legitimacy issues. Combined with being highly visible, parliaments are also accountable to everyone: each voter contributed to parliament and has a sense of ownership of the institution (Leston-Bandeira, 2014). To add to this, parliaments are collective and large institutions, which means parliaments lack of a clearly identifiable collective institutional voice—someone who speaks and acts for parliament is another challenge (Leston-Bandeira, 2007, 2014; Kelso, 2007). Again, this hinders the process of implementation of ICT when quick (and sometimes controversial) decisions need to be identified and made.

Therefore, due to its characteristics, 'it is often a major task to introduce any changes in a parliamentary institution' (Leston-Bandeira, 2007: 656). Specifically, the combination of the fact that parliaments are collective bodies and with a high degree of visibility, added to the fact that they have to be seen as taking accountable decisions, means that any introduction of changes often faces many hurdles. Consequently, the pace of parliamentary change is therefore often inadequate to the pace of ICT change.

On a practical level, ICTs tools and Internet in general also raise technical challenges. For instance, political websites are entirely dependent on people finding them (Carlson and Djupsund, 2001, 85). The costs of constructing and maintaining sophisticated political websites are 'steadily rising and the need to employ technical expertise in order to stay up-to-date is accentuated' (Margolis et al., 2003: 58). Thus, vital resources need to be spent on the systematisation of the material and its design (Logren et al., 1999; Leston-Bandeira, 2007). For instance, websites are not interesting in a work situation unless you can work with it. It must be logically designed to get a return (Logren et al., 1999). Email overload may be a problem, for instance, but it can be addressed if adequate resources and support staff are available (Ibid.).

Additionally, there are also technical challenges in ensuring that the new and emerging Web-enabled interactive processes are available for long term access for the historical interest of future generations, which is fundamental to long term democratic accountability and transparency (Missingham, 2011). Furthermore, the ambiguity and complexity of these digital mechanisms and tools, which can facilitate and stimulate digital engagement for citizens, may also create obstacles to parliaments. For instance, all people involved should be able to understand the functioning of these digital tools. This means citizens, politicians and parliamentary staff have to be literate in digital language. (Barros et al., 2016).

Finally, the potential of the Internet can face many challenges in the way it is implemented 'depending on the institutional characteristics of each parliament' (Leston-Bandeira, 2007: 658). As Olesen et al. (2006) note: 'The starting point for supporting the use of ICTs in parliaments is not the deployment of the latest technology, but rather a comprehensive understanding of the way in which parliaments operate [...]'. These arguments stress once again the importance to look at each parliament institutional characteristics as well the context in which they operate.

1.1.3 Why engage?

Why does engagement matter? Why should parliaments promote public engagement? There are normative and practical arguments in favour of this engagement (Stewart, 2009).

The normative discussion inevitably takes us beyond the parliamentary arena, into the realms of the relationship between citizen and politics. The normative arguments for enhanced citizen participation have been well set out (e.g. Fung, 2006; Dahlgren, 2009). First, democracies are incredibly complex structures that require many conditions to be met for it to function properly, including the engagement of citizens (Schmitter and Karl, 1991; Dahlgren, 2009). Citizens are the most distinctive element in democracies, it is the engagement of citizens 'that gives democracy its legitimacy as well as its vitality' (Ibid.: 12). At the bottom, democracy is for and about its citizens and therefore requires some minimal of civic input to function. An emphasis on civic engagement and participation is no to be necessarily equated with a model of 'direct' or' 'participatory' democracy but is central to democracy even in its representational form (Ibid.).

Second, engagement helps decrease, or in some ways, overcome democratic deficits that have emerged in the functioning of modern democracies (Fung, 2006), such as the 'crisis of political communication' (Coleman et al. 1999) or the 'unpopularity of parliaments' (Power, 2012). The nature of the relationship between elected representative and citizens is clearly complex, with many possibilities for 'disconnections' to occur as shown before. For instance, evidence indicates that parliaments have embarked on an endless pursuit of trust, given the acute levels of political disengagement (Leston-Bandeira, 2012b). Political trust is not exclusively linked to rational judgement, but also relies on symbolic representations produced with irrational and affective responses originating from the citizens in relation to political institutions (Pitkin, 1967). This more symbolic element in representation is sometimes linked to arguments about making political institutions more legitimate, more obviously and visibly representative of those they pretend to represent (Phillips, 1995). In this way, just offering information to people is not enough. Parliaments need to promote engagement and implement tools of democratic participation in order to improve their legitimacy and overcome the current challenges they are facing.

Many parliaments have taken action and become more accessible, transparent and visible in order to improve their image and legitimacy (Leston-Bandeira, 2012c). There is a widespread belief among many policy-makers that providing opportunities for citizens to deliberate about matters of public concern is an effective response to high levels of disillusionment and disenchantment with the political process (Dalton, 2004; Stoker, 2016). Hence, engagement helps to overcome these democratic deficits by, at the lowest level, improving legitimacy for political actors and institutions (Stewart, 2009).

The practical arguments relate to the benefits of citizens' engagement for the public managers employed in policy making. For instance, engagement improves the likelihood of successful policy by enhancing information flows and encouraging diversity of policy advice (Ibid.). For instance, citizens and businesses are especially important external sources of ideas, since they also directly feel the impact of new policies and services; citizens can also be important external experts on relevant issues (Holmes, 2011). This is an instrumental argument, as it considers engagement as a mechanism that maximizes the flow of useful knowledge to decision-makers (Ibid.).

Nevertheless, of course, there are risks associated with engagement, as well as rewards. Consulting the public might privilege some specific groups at the expense of others. However, the literature has shown that in many fields (particularly those where many different kinds of actions must be coordinated), the benefits of engagement would appear to outweigh the costs (Stewart, 2009).

1.2 STATE OF THE FIELD: EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE TO DATE

During the last two decades, a growing body of literature that examines information and communication technologies and its impact on parliaments has emerged. The research on parliamentary use of new media could be divided into two major categories: the studies that emphasize the institution as a whole and the studies that emphasize individual parliamentarians (Francoli and Ward, 2008). Although the use of ICTs by representatives is now well documented (e.g. Coleman, 2001; Jackson and Lilleker, 2011; Tenscher, 2014) the study of how parliaments are using these mechanisms is still in its infancy.

Since Norris' (2001a) and Treschel's et al. (2003) ground-breaking work, a series of case studies and a few comparative studies have analysed parliaments' endeavours on the pursue of electronic democracy in the last two decades. Some of these works have focused on PWs while others have looked at all types of digital initiatives parliaments might be promoting. Additionally, many of the studies analysing PWs were not concerned with measuring their public engagement activities; instead, some studies were more interested in measuring how parliaments are adapting to ICT overall. Therefore, this state of the art looks at all of these strands of literature, as long as they are considered relevant for this study, including both comparative studies and case studies.

1.2.1 Lessons from comparative and case studies

Even though there is a lack of comparative studies on this issue, there are a handful of works that have taken advantage of the comparative method. The majority has measured directly the PWs (content analysis), following Norris (2001a) and Treschel et al. (2003); others have applied surveys to officials (and MPs) in parliaments in order to examine parliaments' practices on these issues (Coleman, 2006; IPU, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018).

In her book, Pippa Norris reviews on the Digital Divide (2001a) the whole universe of PWs around the world. While Alexander Treschel et al. (2003) analyse the whole universe of European PWs. Together these two works mark the advent of studies on parliaments' usage of ICTs, with a clear focus on parliaments as a whole rather than representatives. They integrate for the first time some institutional and political variables in order to understand the existing differences between parliaments.

Norris (2001a) found that over half the countries in her global survey had some form of a legislative website. Her numbers indicate that legislative websites have become a universal

trend throughout Scandinavia, North America and Western Europe with the exception of Cyprus (Ibid.). The author measured the quality of information and the level of opportunities for communication on PWs with two self-created indexes of information and communication ranging from 0 to 100. The information index looks at the existence of seven key items such as the calendar of parliamentary business or the status of pending legislation, while the communication index looks at the opportunities for communication, such as feedback mechanisms and search tools. Norris's (2001a) results demonstrate that North American, Western European and Scandinavian parliaments have the richest informational and communication facilities on their website.

Norris also tested macro-level variables to assess what were the predicting variables of the quality of information and communication functions of PWs: level of democratization, human development index, population size and the percentage of the online population (Ibid.). The results from a multivariate regression model showed that the level of democratization proved to be by far the strongest and most significant predictor of the quality of the information and communication functions of a parliamentary website (even controlling for socioeconomic and technological development). Again, the political context, broad systemic rules, and institutional history and resources have all been cited as important factors in the uptake and use of the technology by parliaments.

Trechsel et al. (2003) evaluated 38 PWs, including 14 unicameral systems and 12 bicameral systems, analysing both upper and lower chambers. This number corresponds to fifteen EU member states, ten accession countries (at that time), and the European Parliament. The authors created two indexes: 'e-parties' and 'e-legislature', which both present a comprehensive and systematic comparison of member and candidate states in European Union regarding the introduction and diffusion of ICT and its significant impact (or not) upon the practice of democracy. They found a considerable variation in the use of ICT among parliaments (including the European parliament). They also found that the unique variable strongly correlated with parliamentary website development is the size of the countries' population (with larger and, presumably, more resourceful): larger is the political unit the more developed is its parliamentary website likely to be. Furthermore, none of the usual socio-economic and theoretical suspects (such as the diffusion of computers to home and office, the intensity of their use by a population that is becoming increasingly e-literate) explained the differences among parliaments. This leads the authors to conclude that 'these divergent (if

perhaps temporary) outcomes are being driven by specific public policies and political pressures in each of the countries' (Trechsel et al., 2003: 41-42).

Recently, Schwanholz et al. (2018) and Triga and Milioni (2014) conducted comparative and longitudinal studies about the relationship between parliaments and Internet in Europe. The latter focused only on Southern Europe (Greece, Cyprus, Portugal, Italy, Spain, and also the European parliament); while Schwanholz et al. (2018) focused on the 28-member states of European Union. Once again, both studies make use of different operationalizations, therefore using different variables to examine PWs, either in nature and in number. Nevertheless, , these appear to be the only studies exploring the dynamics of parliamentary public engagement strategies over time.

Triga and Milioni (2014) used the same variables as Treschel et al (2003), which enables the comparison of PWs in 2003, 2011 and 2014. Having previously surveyed PWs in January 2015 (Theiner et al., 2018), Schwanholz et al. (2018) updated the data in December 2016. Although there is not much time span between the two points in time, the authors found 'significant changes' mostly pointing 'towards a direction of augmentation, but there were some notable reductions' Schwanholz et al. (2018: 352-353). This corroborates the findings of Triga and Milioni (2014), who have highlighted that parliaments' usage of ICT is characterized by its volatility and discontinuity rather than continuous linear growth. Whereas information supply and bilateral interactive applications follow a steady but expected progress over time, multilateral interactivity features fluctuate between stagnation and retrogression, pointing to a tendency of parliaments avoiding taking a greater risk of opening up their practices to citizens. Joshi and Rosenfield (2013)[12] also corroborates this idea that parliaments are avoiding more advanced applications of ICT. To the authors' surprise, they found that the majority of PWs are also inefficient in terms of transparency and failed to provide basic information for getting in touch with MPs. They also report differences considering the wealth of democracy: countries with higher levels of economic development and democratic political regimes displayed greater transparency.

Schwanholz et al. (2018) used the initial data of Theiner et al. (2018), which queried 28 PWs of European states in 2015 to examine whether they made use of 14 specific digital media tools, especially Web 2.0 features, and whether those tools were functioning properly. The difference between these two studies is that the latter is mainly descriptive, while

[12] The study focuses only on two particular issues measuring transparency: the provision of MPs contacts and the provision of links to social media on PWs.

the first one adds an explanatory analysis, although limited due to the reduced number of cases. Both studies find differences among cases: a clear frontrunner, the United Kingdom, two midfield groups, and a cluster of countries in Southern and Eastern Europe scoring significantly below the average. Although they cannot draw a clear landscape of winners and losers, 'the results show a differentiated map of over- and underachievers who do not fit typical explanatory factors' (Theiner et al., 2018: 4). Again, the usual suspects have not produced relevant explanations, but GDP per capita was statistically significant despite the limitations of the regression approach. This underlines the importance of overall prosperity in explaining parliamentary media strategies (Schwanholz et al., (2018). Furthermore, they also show that parliaments make the most extensive use of social media where the levels of trust in parliament are especially low (Ibid.).

Parliaments have slowly emerged as presences in social media in a variety of ways (IPU, 2018; Barros et al., 2016; Missingham, 2011). Institutional profiles in social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, have proved to offer parliaments many new possibilities of public engagement, such as direct access to citizens which is not mediated by the media or parties, direct access to a younger public, the possibility to react more quickly to news and events, the possibility to engage the public into a conversation and also external support for parliamentary debates or give them more visibility in the public sphere (Leston-Bandeira and Bender 2013; Barros et al., 2016). For instance, in Brazil the Chamber of Deputies offers as many possibilities as possible to facilitate contact and interaction with the public by having several institutional profiles on twitter and Facebook (16 in total), such as the Online News Agency, the TV channel, radio and newspaper, as well as e-Democracy, Plenarinho - special page for children (Barros et al., 2016).

Contrary to the previous studies, the comparative works of Coleman (2006) and IPU (2008; 2018) use *survey research* to examine parliaments use of ICT. Both studies gather data from a large range of parliamentary chambers in Europe (Coleman, 2006) and in the world (IPU, 2008; 2018). Coleman (2006) gathered data from 44 parliamentary chambers, through a survey of European parliamentary officials in charge of managing internal and external information and communication, making it one of the most extensive European surveys of its kind, while, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the Global Centre for ICT have systematically, since 2008, surveyed both parliamentary staff and MPs bi-annually. Although the data do not correspond to actual use, but to the way that use is being reported by parliaments, they do provide relevant results.

The main goal of Coleman's study was to assess how far digital ICTs are being used in order to make parliaments more open/transparent and discursive/consultable. The findings suggest that digital information/communication technologies are being used widely, but there is limited use of interactive features that allow citizens to comment and deliberate on policy issues. Most parliaments do not go beyond a simple opportunity to submit random comments (Coleman, 2006). This conclusion is also supported by Norris (2001a), Treschel et al (2003) and Triga and Milionis' works (2014), given most of the parliaments perform better on the information supply than on communication and multilateral interactivity opportunities. Leston-Bandeira (2009), when studying the parliamentary functions portrayed on PWs of Europeans democracies, shows that legislation is the main focus of websites, while representation has been devoted less space. This work reinforces that, overall, parliaments are providing a large amount of information, such as bills and amendments, but are failing to provide opportunities for more interactive communication with the parliament and MPs (Ibid.).

This rather negative picture might be changing according to the findings of the most recent Global Survey of ICT (2018). The report concludes that 'parliaments are finally using ICT more effectively' (IPU, 2018: 3). The significant gap between the potential of ICT and what parliaments had actually accomplished, found in the first 2008 report, seems to be closing. Berntzen et al. (2006: 11) went so far as to claim that 'there is clearly a mismatch between what the technology can deliver and the extent to which it is being used'. Nowadays, it seems parliaments are finally using ICT more effectively, in all aspects of their work, including in its relationship with the public (IPU, 2018). Although the report does not empirically test causal factors, it advances some underlying systemic factors that might affect parliamentary innovation, such as political will and public pressure, internal skill sets, technological resources, and collaborations and partnerships with civil society, especially with parliamentary monitoring organizations (PMOs). Furthermore, these policy reports, both from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the Hansard Society are practical documents in their nature, which lack a robust theoretical examination of the issues (Seo, 2017).

Although this literature uses different theoretical frameworks, different measures to operationalize parliaments' usage of ICTs and, in some cases, even applies different methodologies, it has reported a few common findings. First, studies have consistently reported a considerable variation among parliaments in the use of ICT, either at the European level or the global level (e.g. Norris, 2001a; Treschel et al. 2003; Theiner et al., 2018). Second, contrary to wider parliamentary public engagement activities (such as information supply), mechanisms

for public input into the formal legislative process are still scarce. There is an expansion of democratic innovations that do focus on the public's deliberation of policies (Fung and Wright, 2003; Smith, 2009), but they are not usually integrated into formal national legislative processes (Leston-Bandeira and Thompson, 2017). This means that most PWs offer more information than actual participation opportunities (e.g Sobaci, 2010; Triga and Milioni, 2014; Bernardes and Leston-Bandeira, 2016). Recent evidence also seems to indicate that parliaments are taking advantage of Web 2.0 applications, especially social media. Usage by parliaments continues to rise (IPU, 2018; Schwanholz et al., 2018); but there are still a few parliaments that do not have any social media presence (Theiner et al., 2018). Table 1.1 summarizes the contributions of major works on this topic that have employed a comparative method.

On the causal explanations for this variation, however, few have dived into the possible explanations for this variation. Some have suggested key factors and pointed in a few directions (e.g. Leston-Bandeira, 2007), but few have empirically tested causal models in order to explain these phenomena. Nevertheless, what results from both theoretical and empirical contributions is that testable empirical hypotheses to explain these phenomena can be derived from a layered causal model, with one layer situated at the systemic (macro) level, one at the organizational (meso) level and a final one layer situated at the individual (micro) level[13].

At the system level, the interaction between economic, technological and political factors have been reported to impact how political actors and institutions make use of ICTs to reach the public (Vaccari, 2008). First, patterns of digital media use by parliaments merely mirror how widespread their use is among the population of their respective countries (Schwanholz et al., 2018). Therefore, the technological development— that is, the diffusion of Internet connections, the availability of broadband, and the level of Internet skills among the population— at least theoretically, should affect the incentives (or lack thereof) that parliaments have in establishing and maintaining their online presence, as well as citizens' expectations of it (Norris, 2001a; Schwanholz et al., 2018). Second, also at the system level, the importance of overall economic prosperity in explaining parliamentary media strategies has been pointed out as important. Finally, also at the system level, the political environment comprises institutional and political factors, such as the electoral system and constitutional powers, determine the institutional 'rules of the game'. These, in turn, have a direct impact on many of parliaments' key features and the ways in which parliament connects

[13] Chapter VI will explain in more detail the causal models.

with citizens (Treschel et al., 2003; Leston-Bandeira, 2007). Institutional characteristics may thus influence the incentives and constraints that affect how different political actors communicate online.

At the organizational level, parliaments' characteristics mainly involve two aspects: resources and incentives. Resources, such as the equipment and tools made available specifically to MPs, but also wider tools available in the institution of parliament as well as parliamentary staff, are important (Leston-Bandeira, 2007). For parliaments with larger financial resources at their disposal and large and skilled staffs, the opportunity costs of online communication are lower than for parliaments that need to make ends meet with fewer resources.

Finally, at the individual level, political culture, that is, citizens' knowledge, attitudes, and evaluations regarding the political system (Almond and Verba, 1963; Norris, 1999, 2011) and political participation in its various forms, define the demand side of political communication (Kluver, 2005). Therefore, citizens' demand for different forms of political communication and engagement, as well as citizens' attitudes towards the political system in general and the parliament in particular might affect how parliaments approach ICTs. For instance, some case studies have shown that several parliaments are publicizing information in order to improve their reputation, build a better public image for the institution and strengthen parliament's legitimacy (Fox, 2009; Bernardes and Leston-Bandeira, 2016). Also, countries with particularly low levels of trust in parliament make the most use of social media applications (see Gabriel, 2008).

Table 1.1 Summary of main comparative studies relevant to the topic

Author(s)(Date)	**Scope and Methodology**	**Dependent Variable(measures)**	**Major findings**	**Explanatory variables identified (sig)**
Norris (2001a)	Large-N study: 179 cases Universe: Parliaments around the World Data collection: Content analysis of PWs (2000); Analysis: Multivariate regression;	-Information Index; -Communication Index	- Half the countries had some form of legislative website; - Parliaments are providing new ways for the public to learn about their structure, functions and activities; - Level of democratization is the strongest predictor of both indexes;	-Level of democratization -% of population online
Treschel et al. (2003)	Medium-N study: 38 cases Universe: 15 EU states and 10 candidates Data collection: Content analysis of PWs (2002); Analysis: Univariate and bivariate analysis	- E-Legislature Index	-Considerable variation in the use of ICT by both parliaments and parties; - Large countries (with larger and, presumably, more resourceful parliaments) tend to have more developed websites;	-Population of the country
Setälä and Grönlund (2006)	Small-N study: 18 cases Universe: Mostly Europe, but also New Zeeland, USA, Australia Data collection: Content analysis of PWs (2005/6); Analysis: Univariate analysis	-Information items; -Legislation items; -Interactivity items;	-Small differences in the contents of PWs; - PWs lay much emphasis on the role of MPs; - Most websites fail to give a sufficient account of the role of parliamentary parties.	-none
IPU (2008; 2009; 2010; 2012; 2014; 2016;2018)	Large-N study: 105 (2008); 134 (2010); 156 (2012); (2014); 114 (2016; 2018); Universe: World Wide	-Several (e.g. Oversight and management of ICT; Communication	-Variation among developed and resourced countries and less developed countries;	-none

	Data collection process: Survey of parliamentary staff and MPs (bi-annual from 2007 to 2018); Analysis: Univariate and bivariate analysis	between citizens and parliament etc)	-Nowadays, digital technologies are firmly embedded with clearly identified governance and technology practices in most parliaments; - Social media use continues to rise; -Over a 1/3 of the parliaments now collaborate directly with PMOs (in 2018);	
Triga and Milioni (2014)	Small-N study: 6 cases Universe: Greece, Cyprus, Portugal, Italy, Spain, and the European Union Data collection: Content analysis of PWs (2004; 2011; 2013); Analysis: Univariate analysis	- E-legislature Index:	- Most of parliaments invest in 'Information Provision' and 'Bilateral interactivity', whereas 'Multilateral Interactivity' is much lower; - Trend over time is one of volatility and discontinuity rather than of a continuous linear growth;	-none
Bernardes and Leston-Bandeira (2016)	Case studies: 2 cases Universe: UK and Brazil Data collection: Content analysis of PWs (2013); Analysis: Univariate analysis and interviews	-2 Information indexes; - Engagement tools Index:	-Both websites have a higher focus on information rather than engagement;	-none
Theiner et al.(2018) and Schwanholz et al. (2018)	Medium-N study: 28 cases Universe: EU members-states Data collection: Content analysis of PWs (2015); Analysis: Univariate analysis	- One-dimensional index; - Two-dimensional index; -Three-dimensional index;	-There is considerable variation in the use of ICT by parliaments; - Half of all parliaments did not have any social media presence;	- GDP per capita

1.2.2 Concluding remarks

Since its emergence, two decades ago, the study of 'digital parliaments' has been accompanied by some theoretical and empirical ambiguities. Moreover, the state of the art on this topic has highlighted two major problems.

First, many of the studies analysing parliamentary websites were not concerned with measuring their public engagement activities. Instead, some studies were more interested in measuring how parliaments are adapting to ICTs overall. This means that there are different frameworks, but also that there is a problem of measurement. Even those that were concerned with measuring parliaments' public engagement activities have used different measures. This reflects the lack of systematic work measuring what is supposed to be the 'new role of parliaments' – public engagement. This lack of clarity has sometimes led to conflicting findings and therefore fosters confusion.

Second, even though some have suggested key factors and pointed in some directions (e.g. Leston-Bandeira, 2007), few have empirically tested causal models in order to explain these phenomena. The majority of studies in this field provides only a description of the uses and practices of parliaments and does not explain the causes and factors underlying it. There is still a lack of deep knowledge on the mechanisms and processes beyond parliaments change, towards a more digital presence; on how parliaments respond to current challenges posed by the networked society; and on the causal conditions the lead parliaments to become 'digital' and 'engaged' with their citizens.

This thesis addresses these two problems. Regarding the first (the problem of measurement), it seeks to provide a more fruitful framework for the analysis of online public engagement. A framework that builds up on previous literature, provides different angles of analysis and easily travels across different political systems and countries. Also, one that is versatile, in order to obtain an overview of parliaments' online public engagement supply, and at the same time, that manages to disentangle the different ways parliaments promote engagement, such as informing, communicating and promoting participation.

Regarding the second question, although only a handful of studies have focused on the concept of public engagement as a dependent variable, there is a wide literature dedicated to parliaments' digital endeavors (and other political institutions), on which it is possible to rely on to elaborate some explanations and expectations. The adoption of digital media by parliaments must not be treated like an all- or- nothing question, as the normalization theory

would have it. Nor should digital politics be evaluated based on normative assumptions regarding good and bad, sufficient and insufficient uses of technology. A much more promising research endeavour, to which this thesis aims to contribute, employs the comparative method to investigate the empirical conditions under which different parliaments choose to adopt different aspects of Internet communications to engage with the public (Zittel, 2003). This means considering the different interplays between the degrees of online public engagement supply and the offline and online context parliaments operate. This matters since there is not sufficient systematic work about the sources and mechanisms of varying degrees of parliamentary public engagement, from both the longitudinal and the cross-sectional perspective.

CHAPTER II

RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter presents the research design for the study of parliamentary e-engagement. Research design is here understood as 'the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study's initial research questions […] In this sense, a research design deals with a logical problem and not a logistical problem' (Yin, 2014: 114-115). The logical problem underpinning this thesis is the triangular relationship between parliaments, citizens and the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) which is analysed in the context of the new role that European parliament's recently started embracing – *the role of public engagement*. The research design specifies the framework for the study of how parliaments are adapting to the Internet to engage with the public, and lays out the explanations for the dimensionally diverse supply of online engagement activities among parliaments in Europe. Finally, it also accounts for the processes and mechanisms by which parliaments are changing and adapting their relationship with citizens though the use of ICTs, and more specifically websites and social media.

Understanding and explaining a complex and dynamic phenomenon such as parliamentary e-engagement in a broad sample of cases requires a combination of methods, thus this research is developed through the implementation mixed method design. Specifically, a sequential design that combines quantitative and qualitative methods and data in the pursuit of a better answer of the research questions set out in this thesis. Throughout four main sections, this chapter features the roadmap for the full development of this research. In section 2.1, the research questions that guide this dissertation are introduced and explained. Section 2.2 presents the theoretical approach. Section 2.3 briefly presents and summarizes the hypotheses and causal conditions being analysed throughout the thesis. Section 2.4 presents the research design of the study and justifies the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods. Finally, section 2.5 introduces the methods and techniques applied in the thesis, the case selection, and data collection process and the data sources.

2.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This dissertation deals with three main research questions. First, *what tools and features are available on the websites of national parliaments to promote online public engagement?* Second, *why do the levels of online parliamentary public engagement supply vary across countries?* Third, *what are the mechanisms, processes and critical actors explaining parliaments' online public engagement strategies over time?* These questions are sequentially analysed given that it is only by first defining and measuring the level of online parliamentary public engagement supply that it becomes possible to investigate the factors behind its variance across parliaments and the process and mechanisms used by parliaments to implement their online public strategies.

The first stage of analysis seeks to understand *what tools and features are available on the websites of national parliaments, and how do these differ between countries?* (RQ1) This research question encloses the problem of defining and measuring online public engagement or e-engagement[14]. It may not be an original question, in the sense that at least theoretically, Carman (2009) and Leston-Bandeira (2014) have developed frameworks to specifically capture the public engagement supply of parliaments, but empirically there have been, to some extent, a few attempts to deal with it in the past that, but which are now outdated (Treschel, 2000; Norris, 2001a).

Thus, this question remains crucial in both empirical and theoretical terms. On the one hand, important and growing advances in the rapidly changing technological world require updating what engagement means and what tools are now available. For instance, studies conducted in the beginning of the 21st century (Treschel et al. 2003; Norris 2001a) did not consider functionalities now made available by Web 2.0, namely social media and e-petition systems.[15] On the other hand, important theoretical contributions have contributed to advance our knowledge on the linkage between citizens, parliaments and ICTs. Nowadays, there is a better understanding that parliamentary public engagement covers a very wide range of outlets and activities with different purposes, from supply of information to opportunities of participation in public policy formulation (Walker and Leston-Bandeira, 2018). This can include simply providing information or encouraging citizens to have a say in the decision

[14] All the measurement procedures will be developed at greater length in Chapter III.

[15] Furthermore, Norris (2001) does not include any measure of parliaments usage of video or audio content, such as broadcast and webcast of plenary or committee meetings. For more details, see Chapter III.

making process, thus referring to different types of actions and outcomes. Although recent contributions have explored some of the forms of public engagement, especially those that integrate citizen's views into parliamentary activities, such as social media and e-petitions (for example, Setälä and Grönlund, 2006; Dai and Norton, 2007; Carman, 2009, 2010; Fox 2009; Joshi and Rosenfield, 2013; Riehm et al., 2014) – there is a lack of information about the overall process of public engagement activities and which tools parliaments are actually providing to citizens through the use of digital media to enhance public engagement.

There is a paucity of systemic measures that can empirically examine whether and how legislatures connect with citizens through ICTs (Seo, 2017). The same is not true in the field of e-government, which has provided several comparable metrics of political engagement such as the measurement and evaluation tool for citizen engagement and e-participation (METEP), the E-government development Index and the e-participation index (EPI)[16]. These comparative metrics focus on governments and citizens' participation in the policy making process and sometimes without differentiating initiatives and activities of parliaments and governments. Besides, in some cases without even considering parliaments in the analysis. Although these metrics are interesting and important they are not suited to measure parliaments' efforts to promote public engagement. A more comprehensive measure of parliamentary engagement that accounts for the multiples venues and channels available online is clearly lacking, and this constitute an important contribution this thesis seeks to accomplish/provide. It also contributes to the literature by introducing a comprehensive analytical framework to assess the parliamentary public engagement activities in a full.

The second stage of the study seeks to explain *why do the levels of online parliamentary public engagement supply vary across countries?* (RQ2) Most studies in the field essentially provide a description of uses and practices of e-engagement with parliaments and do not attempt to explain country variations. As they mainly focus on the "how many/much" question they leave open the question of "why", which also has important theoretical consequences. Hence so far, the comparative literature on this topic has provided short evidence on the possible explanations for parliaments' supply of online public engagement activities. These include the level of democratization (Norris, 2001a) and the size of the countries' population

[16] For instance, the e-participation index (EPI), a supplementary index to the United Nations E-Government Survey, reflects the e-participation mechanisms that are deployed by governments. This index focuses on information supply by governments to citizens ('e-information sharing'), interaction with stakeholders ('e-consultation'), and engagement in decision making processes ('e-decision making') by looking at government's websites (UN, 2008).

(i.e. more resourceful) (Treschel, 2003) as strong explanatory factors of the development and quality of parliaments websites. Furthermore, socio economic and technological development variables have also been considered. The literature on the so-called 'Cyber-Revolution' has proposed many candidates for the job; wealth and economic development are usually the most obvious suspects. However, besides the usual socio-economic-political 'background' suspects and the 'foreground' factors (such as the diffusion of computers to home and office, the intensity of their use by a population that is becoming increasingly e-literate) institutional and political factors have not been addressed in this puzzle. The idea is that a series of factors from the political context where parliaments operate in, as well as characteristics from the parliaments themselves, are still to be studied as causal conditions to examine whether they are necessary and/or sufficient for a certain level of e-engagement supply of parliaments. Hence, this dissertation offers a contribution to abridge this gap as it focuses on e-engagement as dependent variable (outcome) and uses QCA to examines how far differences in the political and institutional structures of parliaments, as well the economic and technological settings explain the panorama of parliaments supply of e-engagement activities in Europe. All these aspects will be developed at greater length in Chapter V.

Lastly, in the third and final stage of this dissertation the attention is placed on the mechanisms, processes and critical actors explaining parliaments' online public engagement strategies over time. While in the previous research questions, the performed cross-national analysis provides a description and explanation of the sources of variance among cases in one and unique point of time, at this stage, the goal is to examine *what are the mechanisms, processes and critical actors explaining parliaments' online public engagement strategies over time?* (RQ3) In fact, many questions remain unanswered and only through the analysis of a few case studies and immersing in their contexts, can we get a better picture of how parliaments have started to engage with citizens through tools provided by ICTs over the years.

Who is involved in such processes? How do such changes come about? Why did the parliament find itself embracing a public engagement strategy through Internet at that time and under those circumstances? When is parliamentary change most likely to occur - under what set of forces and conditions? These are all important questions still left opened. Therefore this third and final analysis will trace the decision process leading up to the activities and strategies of public engagement; it will explore the reasons underlying those decisions; it will explore how party politics dynamics and the political and cultural contexts influencing these decisions;

and finally, how relevant actors perceive and value public engagement and their role in implementing these strategies and activities.

This final stage of the dissertation seeks to develop a 'mechanism approach'. This approach not only seeks to account for the unique chain of events and process that lead from one situation or event to another but also provides (or encourages) deeper, more direct, and more fine-grained explanations (Hedström and Swedberg, 1998). The search for mechanisms helps to distinguish between 'genuine causality and coincidental association, and it increases the understanding of why we observe what we observe' (Ibid.: 8-9). Hence, at this stage the attention is placed on the process and the mechanism beyond the online strategies of parliaments to engage citizens. But what does it mean process and mechanisms? Merton defines social mechanisms as 'social processes having designated consequences for designated parts of the social structure" (Merton, 1968: 43-44). Thus, at this stage the goal is to 'identify' those mechanisms and to establish under which conditions they 'come into being' and 'fail to operate' (Ibid.).

Hence, the relevance of third question is three-folded. Firstly, to add a micro perspective to the study by discussing some of the patterns observed not only at the macro level but now at the case study level. Secondly, to understand what are the processes and mechanisms that underpin the development and implementation of a parliamentary strategy of online public engagement from the first introduction of ICTs to the present days. Thirdly, to explore concurrent explanations of the variance among parliaments concerning their online engagement strategies, which are either omitted, or poorly assessed, at the macro-level analysis. We are particularly thinking on the role of the political leadership (i.e. the speakers/presidents) in parliament and the impact of the so-called parliamentary monitoring organizations (PMOs), as some of the factors that promote changes in the way parliaments address their relationship with citizens and use ICT for that purpose. All these aspects will be developed at greater length in Chapter VI.

2.2 THEORETICAL APPROACH: LESSONS FROM NEW INSTITUTIONALISM

Since this thesis is concerned with examining and explaining how parliaments are using technology to fulfil their public engagement role within different national contexts, a natural starting point for developing an explanation is the literature on 'institutionalism' and in particular on the 'new institutionalism' (Hall and Taylor, 1996). As Gibson et al. (2003: 11) argues 'the use of new ICTs, experimentation and innovation will take place within the existing institutional frameworks and any study of parliaments, executive agencies or political parties will need to take that into account'. Such institutionalism does not preclude these bodies from making bold advances in using the new tools available to them and exploiting the possibilities offered by the new media (March and Olson, 1989).

Trends towards electronic democracy has proved to 'vary with political context' (Zittel, 2003:90). This finding contradicts the universalism that characterizes cyberoptimism as well as cyberscepticism; it rather points towards 'the importance of political context in the process of political change in the networked society' (Zittel, 2003: 91). Context matters and the adaptability of conventional actors in the political system is expected to be shaped in large part by their existing internal norms and patterns of behaviour as well their political environments (Needham, 2003). Technologies themselves influence choice, but the relationship is indirect, sometimes subtle, and exercised in combination with other economic, cultural, political and social influences. Therefore, given the existence of a multitude of political, cultural and socioeconomic environments one can assume that electronic democracy, in general, and online public engagement supply, in particular, will eventually flourish in many versions, different in scope and design. The crucial research question still concerns the existence of systematic relationships between political context, technological change in telecommunication and electronic democracy.

Institutional analysis provides the tools necessary to understand these relationships, specifically to understand how actors' strategies in using the Internet is constrained and enabled by their institutional environment (Diermeier and Krehbiel, 2003). Institutions not only provide constraints but also offer incentives. They can 'be used to tell why things have gone wrong, but they can also be used to explain how to make things a success' (Yang, 2003: 438). Institutional theory has been useful in understanding organizational change and identifying the relevant aspects of the context in which information technologies are designed, implemented,

and used (Bennett et al., 2004; Fountain, 2001; Hassan and Gil-Garcia, 2007). Institutional theory has also been used to understand a great diversity of phenomena such as ICT adoption and innovation, information systems development, institutionalization of information systems, ICT and organizational change, and ICT use in organizations (Fountain, 2001; Hassan and Gil-Garcia, 2007).

Most of these studies' present characteristics of the old and new institutionalisms, but with a greater emphasis on the new institutionalism approaches (Hassan and Gil- Garcia, 2007). Institutional theory aggregates diverse approaches united by the belief that 'institutions matter', that 'institutions make a difference', that institutions persist over time, and that the behaviour of individuals is influenced by the institutional configurations within which they locate themselves (Judge, 2008). What differentiates these approaches are different understandings of what an institution is and does, what constitutes institutional design and the facility with which institutional change can be brought about (Hall and Taylor, 1996; Judge, 2008). In particular, 'new institutionalism approaches have revitalized the study of institutions generally and reinvigorated the study of legislatures specifically' (Judge, 2008: 116). At the core of new institutionalism 'is the notion that institutions do not necessarily change due to a changing technological environment, or that preferences alone shape politics' (Gibson et al., 2004: 111).

Following this line of reasoning, the effects of the Internet on parliaments will be played out in unexpected ways, profoundly influenced by organizational, political and institutional logics (Åström, 2004). Specifically, different strands of the new institutionalism offer distinct hypotheses about the creation, design, and change of social and political institutions, treating institutions as dependent variables instead of independent or intervening variables. By doing so, it is possible to connect the debate on new institutionalism to electronic democracy.

The purpose of this section is not to provide a comprehensive review of the new institutionalism literature but to introduce some concepts from this literature that will help analysing the data along the thesis.

2.2.1 Basic assumptions of the New Institutionalism

New institutionalism emerged after the 1980s, initially with the works of March and Olsen (1984,1989). Despite its name, new institutionalism is not a single and coherent body of theory or homogenous theory (Lowndes, 1996; Donges and Nitschke, 2016). It is rather a collection of theoretical approaches that highlights the role of institutional requirements on the structure and behaviour of (political) organizations, but differ in their definition of institutions

and the way they work (Tolbert and Zucker, 1999)[17]. While it is common in research fields such as organizational communication or public relations/ strategic communication, it has not been fully considered in political communication research yet, which has the field that has devoted more time to understanding the interplay between digital and politics However, it is increasingly considered to be 'a fertile base to develop a theoretical link between the usage of the Internet by political organizations and their political and social contexts' (Donges and Nitschke, 2016: 118).

Institutional theory looks at institutions as systems of rules with relative permanence that influence individuals as well as organizations. However, it is useful to distinguish different schools of new institutionalism in institutional theory (Hall and Taylor 1996). Following Koelble (1995) and Hall and Taylor (1996), it is possible to generally distinguish three approaches in new institutional theory: rational choice, historical, and sociological institutionalism[18]. The *rational choice approach* still focuses on individuals and their strategic decisions. Political institutions provide the context within actors calculate their costs and benefits (Lowndes, 2002). Therefore, rational choice institutionalism conceptualizes institutions as 'an intervening variable capable of affecting an individual's choices and actions but not determining them' (Koelble, 1995: 232). The *historical approach* (Thelen and Steinmo, 1992; Hall and Taylor, 1998) emphasize on the other hand that preferences are shaped by institutions. Historical institutionalism is concerned with investigating how previous choices made impact upon the future decision making. The *sociological approach*, on the other hand, is concerned with the way in which institutions construct meanings, preferences and even the very identity of individuals – it 'comprises a rejection of rational-actor models, an interest in institutions as independent variables' (DiMaggio and Powell (1991: 8).

Although some scholars are optimistic about potential collaboration among different approaches (DiMaggio, 1998), others are more pessimistic (Nielsen, 2001). Reich (2000) concluded that specific forms of institutionalism are best suited to addressing particular types of research questions. It is important to remember that 'it is institutions that define a stage, but it is actors who determine the performance' (Yang, 2003: 437). Since this thesis is concerned with examining and explaining how parliaments are using the technology to fulfil their public engagement role within different national contexts, and it looks at the institution as a whole

[17] DiMaggio and Powell (1991) claim that there are as many 'new institutionalisms' as there are social sciences.
[18] This Chapter does not attempt to provide a comprehensive review of this broad literature. However, there are some important issues that have to be addressed.

and also at the critical actors involved in the process, both the rational choice approaches and the sociological institutionalism approach are suited for this task. Additionally, to answer the third research question a longitudinal analysis is performed by immersing in two case studies and analysing the chain of events over time that shape today's parliaments public engagement strategies in each case, the historical institutionalism approach will also be suited for this task.

2.2.2 The three schools of rational choice, sociological and historical institutionalism

The dominant paradigm in the field of political communication research treats political organizations, overall, as rational systems, assuming that organizations calculate the costs and benefits of their communication and choose the communicative tools with the lowest cost or the greatest benefits (Scott, 2003). In the field of political communication, this rational paradigm is mainly visible in the 'buzzword' of the professionalization of political organizations and their communications (Negrine and Lilleker, 2002). Implicit in these accounts is the assumption that, over time and through some degree of trial and error, organizations will choose the 'best' technological offerings and learn to use information technologies in better and better ways based on certain criteria (e.g. costs and benefits) to achieve a desired outcome. Political actors are, therefore, assumed to act instrumentally: rational choice institutionalists assume that social actors only create or change institutions if they help to maximize their preferences.

Rational choice theorists view political organizations as having control (agency) regarding its future: that is, they are able to operate *on* their environment to a greater extent than the environment influences them. Thus, external factors play a secondary role: their presence shapes action by providing evidence, but the organization retains the ability to make decisions it sees as best to reach its desired outcomes (Scott, 2003).

Parliaments can differ on all three rational choice dimensions (needs, resources, costs). The rational choice perspective suggests that variations in parliaments' 'resources' such as funding, adequate infrastructures and technological expertise will help predict parliaments strategies of online public engagement.

Although the rational choice perspective provides researchers with a way to explain how organizational decision-makers evaluate and choose among alternatives, it remains incomplete. Rational choice approaches neglect the macro social structure and its social influences. Actions do not happen in a vacuum but are rather 'embedded in concrete, ongoing systems of social relations' (Granovetter, 1985). Rational choice tends to miss the role of

sequencing of events, as well as most longer-term processes that are not captured by the 'snapshot' approach of rational choice models (Pierson, 2004). Especially, regarding technology adoption. Technological change creates new challenges and opportunities for political organizations, but the response to those challenges depends on history, culture, institutions, and paths already taken (Nye, 2002).

Whereas rationalists assume organizations calculate the costs and benefits of their communication and choose the communicative tools with the lowest cost or the greatest benefits, sociological institutionalists assume that political organizations are not as rational and effective as the rational system paradigm assumes. Sociological institutionalists 'rather than taking agents as givens or primitives in social explanations, as rationalists tend to do' are interested in 'showing the socially constructed nature of agents and subjects' (Fearon and Wendt, 2002: 57) by pointing to the constitutive role of systemic (inter and transnational) and/ or sub-systemic (domestic) norms or ideas. Therefore, sociological institutional theories argue that organizations respond to the influences and pressures exerted on them by their social environments, which in turn, limits the organizations' agency. Sociological institutionalists suggest that organizations mostly follow a logic of legitimacy, that is, a 'generalized perception or assumption' that a communicative action is 'desirable, proper or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions' (Suchman, 1995: 574).

The main assumption is that organizations generally do not choose the most effective option, but rather the most legitimate one. Legitimacy has a central role in sociological institutional theory as a force that constrains change and pressures organizations to act alike (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). Concern over legitimacy forces organizations to adopt practices or organizational forms that other organizations have, and therefore, forces organizations to look alike and not be different for fear that they will lack credibility. Therefore, concern over legitimacy is both a source of inertia and a summons to justify particular forms and practices' (Selznick, 1996: 274). In this logic of legitimacy, cost-benefit calculations are replaced by forms of isomorphism.

According to DiMaggio and Powell (1991), isomorphism is a process which forces one unit in a 'population' of institutions to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions. This transference of institutional forms (isomorphic processes) can be induced through coercion, i.e. formal (legal) or informal (cultural) pressures to conform, such as expectations by 'stakeholders', mimetic adaptation (i.e. by copying institutions which are perceived successful or legitimate) or normative adaptation (i.e. endorsement of institutions

and institutional forms) by professionals and networks of experts (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Ashworth et al., 2007). Therefore, the institutionalization of practices concerning online media in parliaments may be explained as a mixture of *coercive isomorphism* (e.g. feeling the duty to have a social media presence); *normative pressure* from the parliamentary staff (e.g. head of communication), which implies that elite actors are, at least in part, actively seeking to remodel the prevailing institutional configurations to comply with a particular set of values and perceived interests (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013); or the *imitation* of perceived best practice models taking place in other parliaments, a response to environmental uncertainty. The concept of isomorphism does not contend that the monitoring and incorporating of institutional requirements is always successful, however (Vowe and Henn, 2016). Institutions may recombine more or less successful institutionalized solutions from several sources, which may include either substantive or symbolic changes, with institutions simply pretending to follow appropriate or innovative forms of communication (Campbell, 2004).

An important conclusion from institutional theory and the logic of isomorphism is the assumption that institutions in a similar institutional environment become homogenous in their organizational structure and behaviour. Therefore, it may be assumed that parliaments sharing similar institutional features and structures might show the same level of online public engagement supply. As Chadwick (2007) argued, similar political organizations develop a similar digital network repertoire. Even though Chadwick was referring to parties and interest groups, the same can be expected to happen among parliaments.

Theories like sociological institutionalism seem to be appropriate to understand parliaments adoption of digital technologies to engage with the public, such as in the form of coercive isomorphism, mimetic processes, and normative pressures. Following this approach, parliaments' strategies of online public engagement at the organizational level may be defined as a reaction to what is happening in their environment and to what other parliaments are doing, which implies change in organizational structure (rules and resources for public engagement) and behaviour (forms of public engagement). Specially, the search for legitimacy is a useful concept to explain organizational behaviour (Bitektine and Haack, 2015), in particular parliaments' behaviour. For instance, in order to gain, maintain or repair legitimacy, parliaments may monitor their environment and incorporate institutional requirements by three mechanism of isomorphism (coercive, normative and mimetic). One strength of the sociological institutionalism perspective is that it is premised on the influence of external forces

to the actors. This leads to a focus on the larger external environment and context in which an organization operates as well as the historical influences within that environment.

While often seen as alternatives, sociological institutionalism theory and rational choice theory can be complementary in explaining organizational phenomena (Tingling and Parent, 2004). The rational choice perspective frames parliaments' online public engagement strategies by focusing on needs, resources and costs. The institutional perspective, in contrast, is premised on the impact of ongoing social relations and complex environments have on parliaments' decisions about their online public engagement strategies. These decisions are influenced by other organizations and contextual pressures. While powerful on their own, combined, the theories show great promise for improved understanding of parliaments' adoption of technologies to engage with the public.

Despite the importance of both sociological and rational choice institutionalism, they do not account for the role of past events, foregoing decisions and establishing moments that lead parliaments along broadly different existing paths. These are important to explain current and future action or decisions (Schreyögg and Sydow, 2010). The initial policy choices and the institutionalized commitments that were achieved regarding parliaments usage of ICTs may determine subsequent decisions on that issue. In summary, parliaments approach to digital media may evolve in response to changing environmental conditions and ongoing political maneuvering but in ways that are constrained by their past trajectories (Gorges, 2003).

Presented in such a straightforward manner, the concept of historical institutionalism is indeed very simple, but 'there is a great deal more to the concept' (Peters, 1999: 63). Historical institutionalism was the first version of the new institutionalism to emerge in the discipline of political science (Ibid.). Historical institutionalism invokes that institutions rest on a set of ideational and material foundations that, if trembled, open possibilities for change. But different institutions rest on different foundations, and so the processes that are likely to disrupt them will also be different (Thelen, 1999).

Another relevant element of historical institutionalism to understand parliaments' change to embrace digital media when engaging with their citizens is looking at 'ideas' as an explanatory variable. According to Hall, elites can 'learn', and change either the instruments and means they employ to pursue their goals, or the goals and ends themselves (Hall, 1993). Also, the concept of 'path dependency' (Krasner, 1984) will be extremely useful. This approach allows to focus on the opportunities for institutional change created over time, especially at the times, when everything 'comes up for grabs' and political actors are searching for answers to

the new problems they face. History is thus divided into 'normal periods' and 'critical junctures', during which major institutional change is possible. As Hall and Taylor note, however, historical institutionalism is 'often unable to account for what precipitates such critical junctures' (1996: 942). As a rule, however, institutional development is incremental and path dependent (Krasner, 1989; Thelen and Steinmo, 1992; Pierson, 2000).

The multiple case studies analysed by the end of this thesis allow for a significantly long-time frame of analysis, which in turn will make it possible to examine in deep the relationships between the formation and implementation of a parliamentary public engagement strategy (or policy) and the large collective bodies (parliamentary staff, MPs, political parties, and pressure groups) which form the power constellations within each particular case study.

2.3 Hypotheses and Causal Mechanisms

Based on the previously discussed theoretical approach and the state of the art (presented in Chapter I) it is now possible to debate on the hypotheses and causal conditions that will be tested throughout this thesis with more emphasis in the second and third phase of this study. First, is important however to clarify that the assessment of these hypothesis will be performed via the Qualitative comparative analysis (QCA), and with the addition of multiple case studies which will refine that same assessment. In this regard, QCA presents as a great tool to test hypotheses or existing theories. More precisely, it enables to corroborate or falsify hypotheses/theories by defining a series of conditions that should yield a particular outcome (Berg-Schlosser et al., 2008). Therefore, by drawing on the literature on the new institutionalism, this thesis will test four main hypotheses following the argument on how parliaments' promotion of online public engagement are shaped differently depending on distinct institutional settings, parliamentary bureaucratic features and contextual and environmental factors (Zittel, 2003).

While the first research question does not imply the test of any hypotheses, since it strictly deals with the problem of measuring and describing practices of online public engagement, the second question demands such specification as it is explanatory by formulation. Furthermore, the third research question requires the identification of other causal mechanisms that will provide new insights and will be compared across the cases studies.

So far, the comparative literature on this topic has provided short evidence on possible explanations for why parliaments are fostering communication strategies and links with

citizens. Nevertheless, the literature on how political institutions evolve towards a more digital presence online has underlined two major driving forces: systemic and contextual pushing forces (macro-level) and organizational pulling forces (meso-level). Thus, this thesis considers a series of factors from the political context where parliaments operate in, as well as characteristics from the parliaments themselves, that are likely to be necessary and/or sufficient causal conditions (in QCA terminology) for a certain level of parliaments' e-engagement supply.

The systematic factors relate to driving forces that emerge from the macro level, i.e. the political, technological, economic and social surroundings where parliaments operate. This may also include technological and societal pushing forces that promote and facilitate the advances of technology. In the earlier years of parliaments' introduction to the digital world, the level of democratization (Norris, 2001a) and the size of the countries' population (i.e. more resourceful countries) (Treschel, 2003) were strong explanatory factors of the development and quality of parliamentary websites. Other usual socio-economic-political 'suspects' and also additional 'foreground' factors (such as the diffusion of computers to home and office, the intensity of their use by a population that is becoming increasingly e-literate) have also been considered in the literature.

Two hypotheses will be tested concerning the impact of the surrounding political, cultural and social environment of parliaments. The idea that context matters is undisputable. Institutions shape – and are collective responses – to a surrounding political, cultural and social environment (Needham, 2003). To that extent parliaments' strategies of online public engagement will eventually flourish in many versions, which may differ in scope and design. This assumption follows the sociological institutionalist premise that institutions respond to the influences and pressures exerted on them by their social, political and economic environments (Suchman, 1995).

First, the *technological hypothesis* draws upon the digital divide theory and suggests that variation in the digital literacy of individuals, which vary within and across countries, may constitute a constraint or an incentive for parliaments to embrace a fully digital presence. Therefore, a strong digital literacy is considered to be a necessary (or sufficient) condition for stronger societal pushes for the introduction of online political engagement tools. In other words, societies with a smaller internet divide have a stronger demand for parliament's supply of tools of e-engagement tools. Increasing levels of educated and digitally skilled individuals in society means more citizens become informed and knowledgeable (Mälkiä et al., 2004),

which creates the necessary conditions for strong citizen pressures to push the parliament to adopt a more digital presence. Second, the *distrust hypothesis* seeks to specify the conditions under which citizens' political attitudes shape parliaments supply of online engagement tools. In this analysis, we are particularly interested in how variables related to political culture trigger changes in parliaments' engagement policies. In particular, citizens' disenchantment with politics and parliaments, could provide a powerful incentive for countries to rethink their parliaments' digital strategies (Theiner et al., 2018). Therefore, this hypothesis stresses that high levels of citizens' political distrust are a necessary (and/or sufficient) condition to encourage parliaments to invest in their online presence to mitigate this trend.

The third explanation relies on organizational factors, that is, it relates to characteristics and bureaucratic features of parliaments that can encourage or constrain their usage of digital technologies to establish links with the citizens. This induces that there are driving forces within the parliamentary bodies, meaning resources, that can explain parliaments' evolution towards a more digital and engaging online presence.[19] For instance, in their study of the websites of European parliaments, Trechsel et al. (2000) offered an indication on how parliamentary resources can be important in the way the Internet is being used: 'It seems to us more likely that the differences [between parliaments] are due to varying organizational structures, strategies and resources of the respective parliamentary administrations' (2000: 17). Despite only briefly approaching this issue, it is mainly concluded that parliamentary resources matter. More recent studies have indeed shown that effective communication and engaging strategies with citizens depend on factors such as the allocation of sufficient resources (Leston-Bandeira 2014). There have not been empirical tests of this explanation in a comparative scale yet, however. Building on this discussion, two types of organizational resources factors are considered: financial and human resources. Thus, the *resources hypothesis* seeks to specify the conditions under which parliamentary resources shape parliaments' supply of online public engagement activities and tools. Our expectation is that parliaments with more resources may have stronger online communication apparatuses than parliaments with fewer resources.

The fourth explanation relates to how (and whether) parliaments' collect benefits from being closely connected to parliamentary networks that promote a culture of knowledge and experiences exchange among the parliamentary community. These benefits may act as incentives for parliaments to adopt ICTs. This can be driven by either resource's considerations

[19] This has the potential to be tautological, however it is important to highlight that

- learning from others may reduce the administrative costs of IT planning - and/or the uncertainty of new experiences. The *learning hypothesis* relies on the classical theory of incremental decision making and bounded rationality, i.e. policy-learning serves as an effective cost-minimizing strategy and a cognitive short cut (Simon, 1957). This fourth hypothesis states that international networks can work as learning mechanism for the parliamentary community, staff and parliamentarians. Thus, the more involved a parliament is within these networks, more channels it has to learn from other parliaments' experiences on the issues of e-democracy. This is mostly relevant in the European context where a culture of learning and exchange of knowledge has been promoted for several years (Raunio, 2006).

Finally, through the case studies analysis other causal mechanisms such as the role of *critical actors (and political will)* are considered. Critical actors are individuals or groups who mobilize to place citizens' engagement issues and concerns on the parliamentary agenda (Chaney, 2012). They may be the pushing force beyond parliamentary online public engagement since successful parliamentary reforms or innovations require a comprehensive strategy with a clear agenda and strong political will among legislators, as well as sufficiently allocated resources. (IPU, 2012; Norton, 2005). Whatever the purpose, parliamentary reform is not easy to achieve since parliaments are usually old and traditional institutions with their own working methods developed over time in the unique political contexts of individual countries. Indeed, it would be a serious mistake to downplay the importance of institutions as we study the relevance of critical actors (and political will) that push for parliamentary changes when it comes to the parliament' relationship with their citizens. Parliamentary actors are embedded in complex institutional environment. Of course, institutions are formed and changed by individuals, just as individuals are shaped and constrained by institutions (Hollingsworth, 2000). Regardless of which came first – individuals or institutions – parliaments face institutionalised constraints on their form and boundaries, which are tied by a rich web of electoral laws, its constitutional law and the nature and culture of the political system. Thus, apart from all the factors and causal mechanisms above, we believe there are additional internal, institutionalized and political mechanisms that might explain parliaments' strategies to digitally engage with citizens such as the previous mentioned political will of critical actors.

2.4 RESEARCH STUDY DESIGN

To answer all three research questions, a mixed methods approach (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003; Creswell et al., 2003; Creswell and Clark, 2011) is adopted, which is a procedure for collecting, analysing and mixing or integrating both quantitative and qualitative data at some stage of the research process within a single project (Creswell, 2005). The rationale for mixing both types of data is that neither quantitative nor qualitative approaches are enough by themselves to capture the trends and specifics of some research problems, such as the complex issue of parliaments-citizens relation in the context of ICT and Internet proliferation as a noted-authority. Pippa Norris has argued: 'No single methodology can hope to capture the rich complexities of life on the Internet' (2001a: 36). Therefore, combining quantitative and qualitative methods provides strengths that offset the weaknesses of both quantitative and qualitative research approaches and provide a more complete picture of the complex research problem being studied (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003; Creswell and Clark, 2011).

2.4.1 Defining mixed methods

Mixed methods research is a new movement, discourse or research paradigm (with a growing number of members) that has arisen during the 20th century as a response to the currents of quantitative research and qualitative research (Johnson et al., 2007). This movement has had several names, such as integrative research (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004), multimethod research (e.g. Morse, 2003), triangulated studies or 'methodological triangulation' (e.g. Sandelowski, 2003), 'combined research' (Creswell, 1994), and mixed research (Johnson, 2006; Johnson and Christensen, 2017). However, mixed methods research has become the most popular term used to describe this movement (Johnson et al., 2007) and for that reason is the one chosen to describe the research design used in this dissertation.

As a new movement (also called third movement) it became increasingly influential from the 1990s, as scholars faced increasingly complex research problems that required answers 'beyond simple numbers in a quantitative sense or words in a qualitative sense' (Creswell and Clark, 2011: 21). Even though we say it is a new movement, researchers for many years have collected both quantitative and qualitative data in the same studies. However, to put both forms of data together as a distinct research design or methodology is in fact new (Creswell, 2007).

Mixed methods have becoming recognized as the third major research approach or research paradigm, along with qualitative research and quantitative research (Johnson et al., 2007). This movement could be seen as a methodology or as method: 'As a methodology, it involves philosophical assumptions that guide the direction of the collection and analysis of data and the mixture of qualitative and quantitative approaches in many phases in the research process'. While, as a method, 'it focuses on collecting, analysing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies' (Creswell and Clark, 2011: 5). However, reporting statistics to contextualize, for example, together with a focus group or interviews does not constitute a mixed method research. Mixed methods research implies mixing qualitative and quantitative techniques and methods and not only data variety (Lin and Loftis, 2005). Concerning this dissertation, it represents both a methodology and a method

The term mixed methods design emerged in the 1980s and broadly describes a research in which the investigator collects and analysis data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study or a program of inquiry (Tashakkori and Creswell, 2007). Similarly, in an attempt to be as inclusive as possible and based on previous definitions, Johnson et al. (2007: 213) define mixed methods research as 'the type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g., use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration'. However, over the years the concept of mixed methods research has been defined in a number of ways – for a systematic review of the multiple definitions, please see Johnson et al. (2007).

Supporters of this design sustain that mixed methods recognize the importance of traditional quantitative and qualitative research but also offers a powerful third paradigm choice that often will provide the most informative, complete, balanced, and useful research results (Creswell, 2003, 2007; Mahoney, 2010). This reflects Greene's (2007: xi) notion that mixed methods researchers should engage in a 'mixed methods way of thinking', whereby we not only mix methodologies but also 'different ways of seeing, interpreting, and knowing' about the social world.

Mixed methods in political science research

In political science, there is the tradition of mixing quantitative and qualitative data for contextual reasons, especially because 'few empirical studies in political science can exist without both words and numbers' (Lin and Loftis, 2005: 3).

Munck and Snyder (2007a) evaluated the current state of comparative political research which led them to find that many studies suffer from a poor application of qualitative and quantitative methods. The authors argue that the combination of small-n and large-n research represents a viable design for promoting the production of knowledge in comparative politics field (Munck and Snyder, 2007b). Also, Fearon and Latin (2008), supporters of this design, sustain that when well done, mixing methods have the advantage of 'combining the strength of large-n designs for identifying empirical regularities and patterns, and the strength of cases studies for revealing the causal mechanisms that give rise to political outcomes of interest' (Ibid.: 759). Therefore, there are specific benefits to be gained by deploying both analytical tools simultaneously, as well benefits of distinct complementarities resulting from this approach.

However, without using the term mixed methods, some political scientists have been already praising or using a mixed method research design. Although nowadays it is more common to find a mixed method approach applied in political science, the efforts to mix and to triangulate methods in comparative politics have become prominent only relatively recently (Berg-Schlosser, 2012).

Regardless, for certain questions and data units of analysis it is possible (and sometimes more suitable) to bring the qualitative and quantitative methods together in the field of comparative politics, such as the study of democratic deterioration (Coppedge, 2005), and the study of party institutionalization (Sanches, 2018) – all have mixed qualitative and quantitate data and methods. The most common practice has been the nested analysis, a medium or large N comparison followed by a small N analysis of careful selected cases (Ragin, 1987; Schmitter; 2009). Case studies can be extremely useful tools to assess whether the arguments proposed to explain empirical regularities are plausible (Fearon and Laitin 2008). Looking at the possibilities available by the qualitative-quantitative continuum, the combination of these methods in political science has become more diverse and richer, including case studies, statistical analysis, formal models, qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) and experiments (Niedzwiecki and Nunnally, 2017). Two decades after Lijphart's (1971) article, Collier (1991) already pointed out that advances in both statistical and small-N approaches, and evidence of

increasing communication across the two approaches, held great promise for scholarly progress. Since then, multiple uses of mixed methods have been employed in the study of the political phenomena.

2.4.2 Types and designs of mixed methods

Various typologies of mixed methods designs have been proposed. Creswell and Plano Clark's (2011) typology of some commonly used designs includes six major mixed methods designs; while Teddlie and Tashakkori's (2009) developed a typology of five sets of mixed methods research designs; also Morse and Niehaus (2009) listed eight mixed methods designs in their book (and suggested that authors create more complex combinations when needed). Recently, Johnson and Christensen (2017) constructed a set of mixed methods designs without some of the common limitations pointed to the previous typologies, resulting in a matrix of nine designs.

Although these typologies are useful, especially in the beginning when practitioners of mixed methods need more guidance, in practice, most designs are very complex, posing a problem to the above typologies. Complex designs are sometimes labelled as a 'complex design', 'multiphase design', 'fully integrated design', 'hybrid design' and so on. Because complex designs occur very often, in practice, the above typologies are not able to fully classify a large part of the existing mixed methods research any further than by labelling them as 'complex', which, in itself, is not very informative. Despite some progress, 'the problem remains in developing a single typology that is effective in comprehensively listing a set of designs for mixed methods research' (Schoonenboom and Johnson, 2017: 120). Even though, the authors have not solved this problem, they have shown that one often needs to construct a research design to fit one's unique research situation and questions (Ibid.). Therefore, it is important to learn how to build on simple designs and construct one's own design for one's research questions. This will often result in a combination or 'hybrid' design that goes beyond the basic designs found in typologies and a methodological section that provides much more information than a design name, which is the case of this thesis.

Developing a complex design

Hence, following Schoonenboom and Johnson (2017) recommendations, instead of using exclusively a typology, which does not fully capture the design of the study and constrains us to its label, we build upon previous typologies and adapted those to construct a design that answers the multiple research questions of this thesis. Thus, in many ways the design resembles the main characteristics of an 'explanatory sequential design' (Creswell et al, 2003), a 'sequential model' (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003), a 'sequential triangulation' (Morse, 1991), or even an 'iteration design' (Greene, 2007)[20]. Overall, the design follows the same sequence of Creswell et al (2003) design, i.e. it consists of two distinct phases: quantitative data and analysis followed by qualitative data and analysis. However, as a matter of fact, the second phase - the qualitative strand- rests on two individual but related studies: although it collects and analysis qualitative data, each study answers different research questions but also uses different methods by focusing on different cases.

Through different lenses, the design can also resemble some elements of a multiphase design in Creswell et al (2003) typology, in which the problem or topic is examined through an iteration of connected quantitative and qualitative studies that are sequentially aligned, with each new approach building on what was learned previously to address a central program objective. However, as explained previously, a 'multiphase design' is an umbrella that does not truly inform about the design itself and as Creswell (2007: 103) stated 'we are only beginning to think about how to classify variants of the multiphase designs'.

2.4.3 Applying a hybrid 'Explanatory Sequential Design'

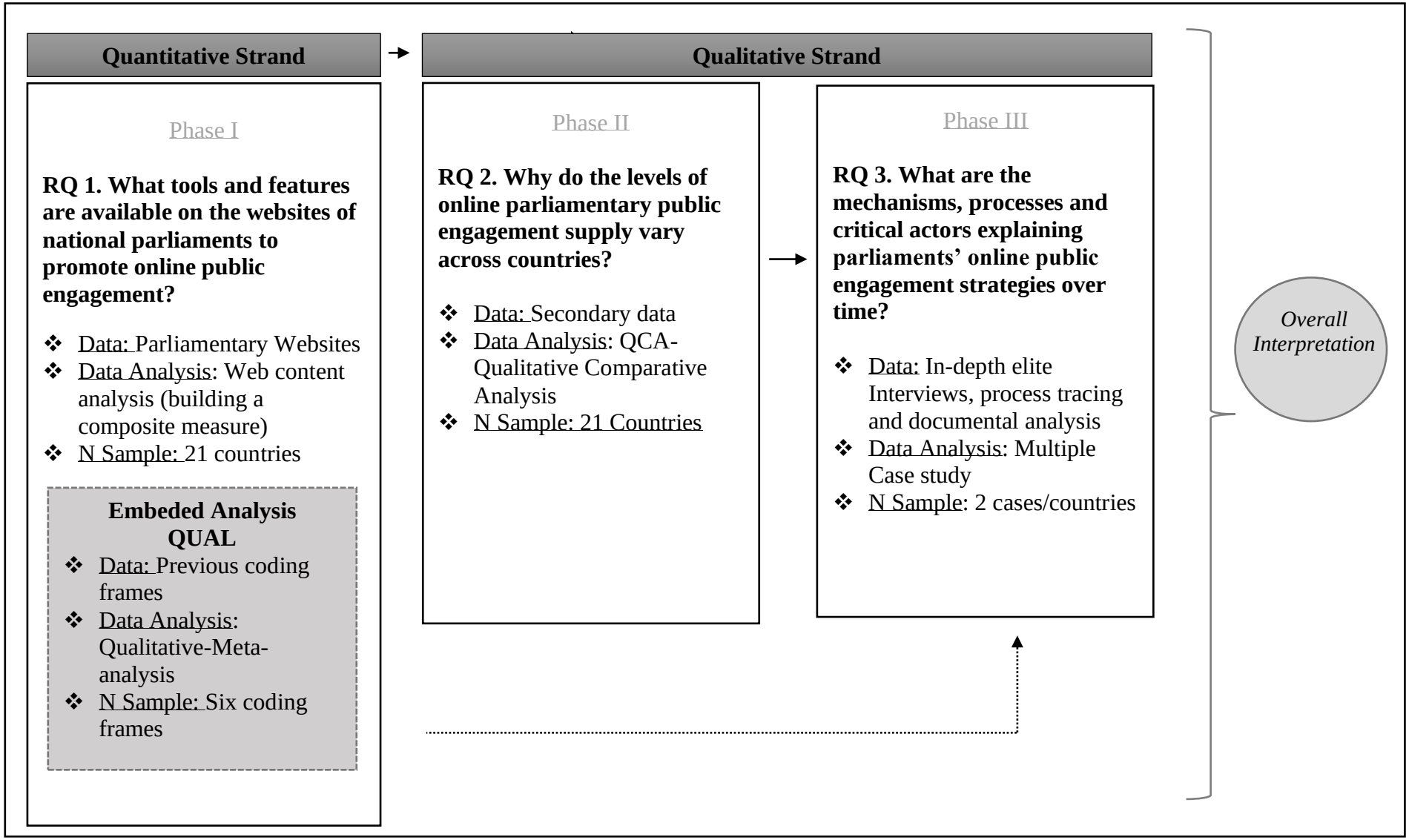
The mixed-methods explanatory sequential design is highly popular among researchers and implies collecting and analysing first quantitative and then qualitative data in two consecutive phases within one study. Its characteristics are well described in the literature (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003; Creswell, 2003, 2005; Creswell et al., 2003), and the design has found application in both social and behavioural sciences research (Ceci 1991; Klassen and Burnaby, 1993).

[20] The novelty of Creswell et al definition is the introduction of specific names to distinguish whether the sequence begins quantitatively or qualitatively (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007).

This study first starts with quantitative data (numeric) data collection and analyses, and then proceeds with qualitative (text) data collection and analyses, in order to help to explain, or elaborate, on the quantitative results obtained in the first phase (Creswell et al., 2003). The second qualitative phase builds on the first quantitative phase, and the two phases are connected in the intermediary stage in the study. The rationale for this approach is that the quantitative data and its subsequent analysis provide a general understanding of the research problem, i.e. on how parliaments are adapting to ICT to engage with citizens. The additional qualitative data and its analysis does not only refine and explain those statistical results by exploring the cases in more depth but also provides answers to the questions left unshared by the quantitative strand, such as the processes and mechanisms behind the decision leading up to the strategies of public engagement. (Rossman and Wilson, 1985; Creswell et al., 2003).

Hence, to fully answer the three research questions set out in this thesis, a range of quantitative and qualitative methods and techniques were used whenever necessary and when the data and the research question required it, which resulted in what can be labelled as a complex or hybrid mixed method research design with three major phases sequentially developed as depicted in figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1 Hybrid sequential explanatory design of the analysis



As schematized in Figure 2.1, data will be collected *sequentially*, that is, it starts with the collection of quantitative data and then proceeds with the qualitative data collection (Creswell et al., 2003). Also, *priority* is given to the quantitative data collection since it largely determines which gaps will be filled with the qualitative data (even though it does not represent the major feature of the mixed-methods data collection process). Finally, the *combination or integration* of methods occurs from the onset of the study, i.e. mixing it in the initial stage of the study while formulating its purpose and introducing both quantitative and qualitative research questions throughout the process of analysing and interpreting the results. Looking at the scheme displayed by Figure 2.1 the sequential design of the study is straightforward, although complex (Tashakkori and Teddlie 2003; Creswell et al. 2003).

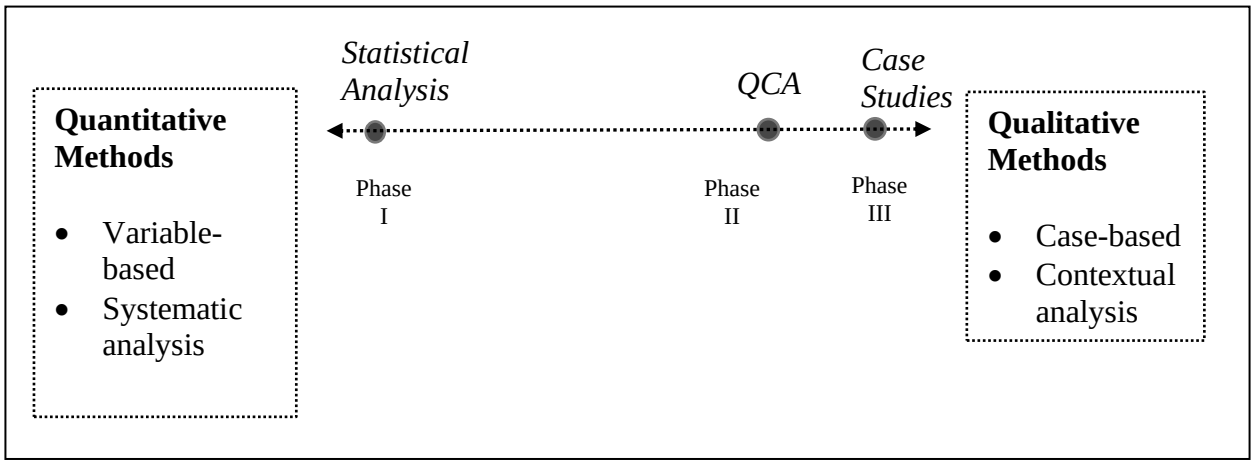
This design is based in the idea that different qualitative and quantitative tools can be used together in ways that preserve their respective strengths while overcoming their respective limitations; and it also emphasizes the benefits of distinct complementarities rather than advocating a single style of research or method (Mahoney, 2010). Thus, as outlined in Figure 2.1, all the research activities employed in the thesis start with the measurement of parliaments online public engagement in Europe, proceeds with the test of the causal combinations of online public engagement levels in a Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) and finally concludes with the discussion and the refinement of the previous results as well the analysis of the process and mechanisms of parliaments respective strategies of public engagement supply in two case studies, where a series of fieldwork activities have had place.

Figure 2.2, adapted from Gross and Garvin (2011), illustrates the spectrum of research methods used in this research design from quantitative to qualitative methods. The statistical analysis employed at the first phase of the research design includes simple statistical procedures such as descriptive statistics. While, at the second phase, QCA was performed. Another way to address the second research question would be trough mainstream quantitative methods, an approach methodology strongly oriented toward regression analysis and econometric refinements on regression (Brady and Collier, 2010). However, due to the lack of observations usually needed for this type of statistical analysis[21] and the practical impossibility to increase the number the observations taking into account the time that would require to achieve a larger and proper sample of parliaments to perform that analysis, QCA is a more

[21] Regression analyses require a higher sample size to achieve adequate power for the study. In general, the number of observations should be at least 20 times greater than the number of variables under study Vis, 2012.

suitable method. Finally, at the third phase of the research design, a multiple case study was performed.

Figure 2.2 Spectrum of methods



The spectrum (figure 2.2.) depicts QCA in between these two primary approaches, but positioned slightly more towards qualitative methods because of its contextual sensitivity to individual cases and frequent reliance on qualitative data as the bases of investigation (Jordan et al, 2011). QCA tools work particularly well within the context of a broader multimethod research design that includes case-study analysis (Mahoney, 2010). Finally, the spectrum also depicts the multiple case study approach (Yin, 2014) used to address the third and final research question which gives us the possibility to immerse into the mechanisms and processes beyond parliament structures and organization concerning the supply of online public engagement. The next section will further have developed the methods and techniques used in this thesis.

2.5 FROM METHODS TO CASE SELECTION

This section entails the major steps undergone on each phase of the research design, including the methods and techniques employed (and their relationship with the research questions set out), the case selection process and also the data collection process and sources used. This section provides a broader picture, more detailed information on the specific procedures employed will be provided along the next individual chapters.

2.5.1 Methods and Techniques embedded

Firstly, in order to investigate the first research question, a four-stage analytical process adapted from Gibson and Ward (2002) was defined, which includes: 1) defining the concepts and public engagement activities; 2) operationalizing variables that measure those concepts and activities; 3) coding websites for the presence or absence of these features; and finally, 4) developing indices to measure how parliaments perform the identified activities. A broad *qualitative meta-analysis* of previous studies was conducted to fulfil not only the first analytical process but as well the second and third step of the four-stage analytical process. Meta-analyses are useful tools to aggregate existing knowledge and to highlight what we know and what we do not know about a certain phenomenon. Through the meta-analysis, it was possible to identify 40 indicators[22] and from these, three main dimensions of public engagement emerged: information; communication and interactive multimedia; consultation and participation.

Afterwards, a comprehensive *quantitative content analysis* of parliamentary websites (PWs) was undertaken on 21 European countries. Each PW was evaluated with a mainly dichotomous coding scheme that features the 40 variables defined according to the theoretical background and built on previous international research used in the meta-analysis. By quantitative content analysis, this means mean objectively extracting and analysing content from texts, i.e. from websites, by opposition to qualitative content analysis, which involves the researcher employing subjective techniques to understand and interpret social reality using texts. Content analysis is an established analytical approach in the social sciences (see Neuendorf, 2002; Krippendorff, 2004) and scholars have worked to define this research method for over half a century[23]. Berelson's (1952) and Krippedorf definitions are perhaps the most quoted, however Riffe et al. (2014: 19) definition reunites some of the major ideas commonly accepted in the literature until now. Their definition stresses that 'quantitative content analysis is the systematic and replicable examination of symbols of communication' to which have been 'assigned numeric values according to valid measurement rules and the analysis of relationships involving those values' in order to describe 'the communication, draw inferences about its meaning or infer from the communication to its context, both of production and consumption'.

[22] The indicators are presented further in the following Chapter.

[23] For discussions of the history of content analysis see Krippendorff, 2004 and Neuendorf, 2002.

Parliamentary websites were analysed in their native languages using the built-in translation tool in Google Chrome, which offers instant Web page translations. Since the content analysis only captures formal content and is not highly sensitive to interpretation or context, this method is suitable for the purpose of this research, given the fact the translated version is not always perfect. Furthermore, this study follows a dichotomous coding scheme (0= absence; 1=presence) such as Norris (2001a) which reduces possible interpretive errors.

Secondly, and moving to the next research question, a *qualitative comparative analysis (QCA*), which was originally developed by Charles C. Ragin, was conducted for this analysis. QCA is a method that enables both an effective classification of findings and attribution of causation across cases and it works particularly well in studies that have a small and medium N (Ragin, 2008). QCA assumes that different combinations of explanatory conditions – in the QCA terminology- may induce the same outcome, which is especially relevant for this study. While the different conditions that are favourable for politicians' and citizens' usage of the Internet for political purposes are well documented, the exact combinations of conditions concerning collective political institutions, such as parliaments, remains a completely open empirical question. An explorative approach to the problem, thus, requires a technique that allows for openness towards the empirical combinations of conditions, i.e. a technique that does not rest on pre-formulated interactions.

Even though QCA presents as a recent set of methods and tools in social science, and in particular in political science, it offers a sophisticated approach to continuous measurement (in the case of fuzzy sets) for 'medium-N methods.' (Mahoney, 2010). Therefore, QCA allows the researcher to be sensitive to complex causality in terms of conjunctural causation and equifinality without, however, giving up the aim of generating generalizable and therefore theoretically fruitful findings (Schneider and Wagemann, 2012). As such, QCA strength rest on being a mid-path way between qualitative and quantitative research that build general knowledge from understanding of specific cases in specific contexts (Ragin, 2008: 5). On a final note, QCA tools also blend well within the context of a broader multi-method research design as the hybrid mixed-method research design applied in this study.

Finally, and continuing with a qualitative approach, in order to understand how parliaments have been implementing a strategy of online public engagement over the years and by which processes and mechanisms parliaments are changing and adapting their relationship with citizens through the use of ICT, a *multiple case study approach* was conducted (Yin,

2014)[24]. This approach implies extensive data collection from different sources, as well as multiple levels of data analysis (Ibid.). Multiple case study designs include more than one case and the analysis is performed at two levels: within each case and across the cases chosen (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). This form of case study still strives for the 'thick description' common in single case studies; however, the goal of comparative (multiple) case studies is to discover contrasts, similarities, or patterns across the cases. Therefore, these discoveries may in turn contribute to the development or the confirmation of theory (Mills et al., 2010).

While the previous cross-national approaches provide an explanation comparing different cases at a single unique point of time, the final phase of the analysis in this thesis allows me to understand how parliaments have been changing over the years since they started to realise the potential of ICT tools and began developing an online public engagement strategy. This can be achieved via *process tracing* and *in-depth semi-structured elite interviews*[25], which will allow us to investigate causal and temporal mechanisms of a contemporary phenomenon in its real-world context. This is especially important since the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context may not be clearly evident in this case.

Process tracing is a research method for tracing causal mechanisms using detailed, within-case empirical analysis of how a causal process plays out in an actual case (Beach, 2017). This method is incredibly relevant since it captures 'causal mechanisms in action' (Bennet and Checkel, 2015: 9). This approach will unveil some new explanatory factors, conditions and mechanisms that might refine the findings or fill the gaps left open by the previous analyses concerning the variables that explain the institutional activities and tools of public engagement being offered by parliaments. Additionally, elite interviewing is 'highly relevant for process tracing approaches to case study research' (Tansey, 2007: 766). This is more noticeable because elite actors – parliamentary actors - will often be critical sources of information about the political processes of interest, i.e. online parliamentary public engagement.

[24] The combination of QCA and follow-up case studies, which has come to be termed set-theoretic multimethod research (MMR) is becoming more and more common in empirical research (Schneider and Rohlfing 2013).
[25] The interviews were analysed through computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, namely MaxQDA.

2.5.2 Case Selection

As previously mentioned, the literature on this issue has been dominated by analyses of Anglo-Saxon countries, and this has had an impact on the previous types of studies developed on parliaments (Leston-Bandeira and Ward 2008). Therefore, the geographical framing of this study includes a sufficient number of countries by taking into consideration as many political, cultural and geographical European contexts as possible. The selection of the 21 lower chambers (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Romania and the United Kingdom) encompass a variety of parliaments in terms of functions, roles, size and even nomenclatures (Norton, 1990). Europe is a great and unique laboratory for an in-depth study of the relationship between parliaments, citizens and the Internet. For instance, experience with democratic rule varies quite substantially within this sample. United Kingdom has been the oldest democracy, while Spain, Portugal and Greece made the transition only in the 1970s. The most important gap, however, exists between Western Europe and the post-communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe, which have only been democratic since the 1990s (see Table 2.1).

In the impossibility of studying the entire universe of European countries, given the limited resources in both human and financial terms[26], a subset of countries were chosen for this analysis. Hence, this research takes into consideration as many political, cultural and geographical European contexts as it is reasonably feasible in order to circumvent small-N problems related to scarcity of statistical power and avoid large-N problems associated with lack of comparability. Thus, the cases were selected following two main criteria: 1) *geographical area* – to achieve a balance of geographical representation in the context of the European Union – and 2) *political and institutional contexts* – to achieve a balance of diversity among parliaments regarding their institutional characteristics such as method of election, democratic history, size, age and roles. Furthermore, the existence of available data was also an important factor for the case selection process for this study, i.e. the existence of a functional and available parliamentary website.

[26] Ideally, a study of European parliaments and Internet/ICT usage would encompass a broad range of democracies in Europe. Given the method employed here and the need for original data collection, this is not feasible. Comparing PWs through an extensive content analysis of websites by applying a coding frame of 40 indicators require a lot of text and features to be analysed. Therefore, the number of countries in this study had to be limited.

Table 2.1 presents some of the variables of interest that capture the diversity of parliaments (cases) included in the analysis. It also presents the cases being analysed in the first and second phase of this thesis. Adding to this, for the multiple case study in the last part of this thesis (phase three), only two cases from this poll of 21 were selected.

Table 2.1 Institutional characteristics of parliaments

Country	Electoral system*	Age**	Size	Structure of Parliament	Geopolitical area***
Austria	Proportional (2017)	73 (1946)	183	Bicameral	WE
Bulgaria	Proportional (2017)	104 (1915)	240	Unicameral	EE
Belgium	Proportional (2014)	29 (1990)	150	Bicameral	WE
Croatia	Proportional (2016)	19 (2000)	151	Unicameral	SE
Denmark	Proportional (2015)	108 (1911)	179	Unicameral	NE
Estonia	Proportional (2015)	28 (1991)	101	Unicameral	NE
Finland	Proportional (2015)	102 (1917)	200	Unicameral	NE
France	Plurality/Maj. (2017)	73 (1946)	577/576	Bicameral	WE
Germany	Mixed (2017)	68 (1951)	598/709	Bicameral	WE
Greece	Proportional (2015)	44 (1975)	300	Unicameral	SE
Hungary	Mixed (2018)	29 (1990)	199	Unicameral	EE
Ireland	Proportional (2016)	98 (1921)	158	Bicameral	NE
Italy	Mixed (2018)	72 (1947)	630	Bicameral	SE
Portugal	Proportional (2015)	43 (1976)	230	Unicameral	SE
Romania	Proportional (2016)	23 (1996)	329	Bicameral	EE
Slovakia	Proportional (2016)	26 (1993)	150	Unicameral	EE
Slovenia	Proportional (2018)	28 (1991)	90	Bicameral	SE
Spain	Proportional (2016)	41 (1978)	350	Bicameral	SE
Sweden	Proportional (2018)	105 (1914)	349	Unicameral	NE
Netherlands	Proportional (2017)	108 (1911)	150	Bicameral	WE
UK	Plurality /Maj. (2017)	139 (1880)	791	Bicameral	NE

Legend: SE= Southern Europe; EE= Eastern Europe; WE= Western Europe; NE= Northern Europe

Note: * Data is based on the IDEA dataset.

** Data is based on the Center for Systemic Peace (CSP) Polity Project which has rated the levels of both democracy and autocracy for each country and year. The emphasis is on the observable practice of public policies, regardless of the political pronouncements and emotive rhetoric of regime or opposition leaders. The POLITY scale ranges from -10, fully institutionalized autocracy, to +10, fully institutionalized democracy. Scores between 6 and 10 are counted as democracies, whereas below 6 to 1 represent open anocracies. Therefore, the

years in the column represent the first and last year the country received a score equal or above than 6.
*** The classification is based on the geographic regions classified by the United Nations. Source: https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49/#geo-regions

Moving to the multiple case study, two key questions need to be addressed: how many cases to choose? And which cases should be chosen? These are the most fundamental methodological questions in a multiple case study and for which the answers are far from straightforward, though obviously contingent on the research topic itself.

The first question deals with the difference between a single and multiple-case studies, which 'are in reality two variants of case study designs' (Yin, 2014: 91). Multiple case study designs include more than one case and the analysis is performed at two levels: within each case and across the chosen cases (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). Even though all designs can lead to successful case studies, 'when you have the choice (and resources), multiple-case designs may be preferred over single-case designs' (Yin, 2014: 194). Additionally, the evidence from multiple cases is often considered more compelling, and the overall study is therefore regarded as being more robust (Herriott and Firestone, 1983); while single-case studies criticism usually reflect fears about the uniqueness or artefactual conditions surrounding the case chosen.

The second question that now arises is which parliaments to include? Given that the number of case studies is limited to two for practical reasons, it is even more important to choose carefully the cases in order to learn as much as possible about online public engagement strategies[27]. There are several strategies and techniques to select case studies (e.g., Mill 1872; Eckstein, 1975; Lijphart, 1971; Przeworski and Teune, 1970). As Seawright and Gerring stated 'many case studies also mix and match case selection strategies', especially when 'the cases allow for a variety of empirical strategies, there is no reason not to pursue them' (2008: 306). Since this strand of the analysis has a twofold goal, namely to refine and fill the gaps left open by previous analyses and understand the mechanisms, processes and actors involved in the strategies of public engagement over time, it seems useful to use *two different strategies* to select the cases: by choosing a *positive* and *a negative case*.

[27] Pragmatic considerations such as time and resources were important to define the number of cases to study. Budgetary, logistical and time factors were also considered. Although, it is always better to have more cases as even only having two cases can begin to blunt such criticism and scepticism: 'if you can do even a 'two-case' case study, your chances of doing a good case study will be better than using a single-case design' (Yin, 2015: 194).

This method is appropriate when the primary objective is to unveil the processes and causal mechanisms behind different political outcomes. Exploring a positive case, in particular a typical case, allows us to better explore the causal mechanisms at work in a general, cross-case relationship (Seawright and Gerring, 2008). While, a negative case is also relevant for several reasons. First, negative cases can give insights into why the outcome fails to occur. Second, they can help guard against theoretical inconsistency between explanations for the outcome and its absence. Third, processes leading to different outcomes are likely to be more diverse than processes leading to the same outcome. This diversity ensures that the mechanisms producing the outcome and its absence are not too similar to be logically capable of resulting in different outcomes (Mikkelsen, 2017)[28].

Portugal (as a positive case) and Austria (as a negative) are ideal for this analysis, and the selection of these countries is supported by the following reasons.[29] First, these two cases illustrate contrasting results across several dimensions of public engagement (and therefore the occurrence of the outcome). On the one hand, Portugal is well above the average, with a high overall public engagement score and above the average in all of the dimensions concerning public engagement instruments and features. On the other hand, Austria has an overall low e-engagement score (below the average)[30] with a particularly low score in one of the dimensions of public engagement – communication and interactive multimedia. Second, Portugal is a typical case set-theoretic multi-method research, which means it exemplifies a stable, cross-case relationship and is well explained by the existing causal model, as was shown in the previous chapter. Meanwhile, Austria is simply a case where the outcome does not occur, which in set-theoretic multi-method research corresponds to the category of irrelevant cases (Mikkelsen, 2017), as the qualitative comparative analysis has shown. These cases 'are neither members of the outcome nor of the condition' but 'become relevant in comparison with a typical case, though' (Schneider and Rohlfing, 2013: 581). Therefore, by exploring the Austrian case, we can show how an explicitly possible outcome fails to come about. This may

[28] For a detail discussion of the advantages of selecting negative cases in set-theoretic MMR see Mikkelsen (2017).
[29] Following the sequential explanatory design, the selection of the cases for this specific strand are mainly based on the quantitative strand and the explanatory analysis assessed by the QCA.
[30] There were other negative cases in the sample, such as Spain. However, Austria, in contrast to Spain, is indeed a puzzling case, as was shown earlier. Besides, following the Possibility Principle of Mahoney and Goertzn (2004) a negative case for further study must be one where the outcome has a real possibility of occurring in this case, i.e. at least one independent variable of the theory under investigation predicts its occurrence/absence, which is clearly the case for Austria.

highlight a need to refine the mechanisms proposed to produce the outcome in positive cases (Ibid.).

Additionally, these two cases also allow us to analyse the strategies of substantive engagement in place in both parliaments, given that they are both experimenting with substantive ways to engage with citizens, even though their overall e-engagement performances are dissimilar. While Austria was chosen as a negative case, given its generally low e-engagement performance (below the average), it has a puzzling result given its endeavours to promote substantive engagement. Although Austria is below the average, it scores well above other cases when it comes to substantive instruments and features to promote public engagement, which make it an interesting negative case. This allows us to enrich the analysis by once again disentangling the multiple ways parliaments engage with citizens, complementing the QCA analysis and illustrating the gradations of public engagement.

Therefore, analysing two contrasting cases will help to advance the literature on online public engagement since it allows to understand the causal mechanisms and processes beyond different parliamentary strategies of engagement with citizens and its final outcomes. Ultimately, this will help to develop a theory that explains both the "norm" and the "exception", which will be relevant to understand the failure and success of these mechanisms.

Finally, despite the fact that several procedures were taken into consideration when selecting the cases, there are always potential limitations of case studies analysis to acknowledge which include, for instance, the indeterminacy or inability to exclude all but one explanation, the lack of independence of cases and, finally, the impossibility of perfectly controlling case comparisons (Bennet and Elman, 2008).

2.5.3 Data Collection and Data Sources

This section describes the sources and the type of data collected at each stage of the research. Concerning the first research question, each PW was evaluated with a mainly dichotomous coding scheme that features 40 variables. The content analysis of the PWs followed the standard process steps of conceptualization, operationalization, elaboration of a coding scheme, sampling, coding the data, assessment of reliability and analysis and report of the data defined by Neuendorf (2002).

The coding distinguishes different levels of engagement, from more formalistic to more substantive, identifying different types and levels of public engagement activities. This allows

me to fully investigate the extent to which European parliaments are using ICT to promote online public engagement. The measurement of the 21 selected websites took place between July and December 2017. Due to the dynamic nature of the Web, any website or social media profile can only offer a snapshot – a picture of the content present at a very specific moment of time. The analysis here performed consists of a synchronic element, given the large scope of study.

For the second research question, the data was mainly retrieved from free online secondary data sources. For instance, data on parliaments' resources was collected from the PARLINE dataset (2017) of the Inter-parliamentary Union and complemented by the European Center for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD) in a collaboration with the Portuguese parliament to fill some gaps. Another example, data on the socio-economic development of a was collected by World Economic Forum. A full list of sources will be presented in Chapter VI when each of the variables included in the QCA are presented.

Finally, the third research question is mostly researched with qualitative data. To provide the richness, the depth of the case description and also to enhance data credibility (Patton, 1990; Yin, 2003; Stake 1995; Creswell 1998), multiple sources for collecting different types of data were used: (1) in-depth semi structured interviews with parliamentary officials, MPs and national experts; (2) additional materials, such as documents, reports of parliamentary committees, provided by each participant or found during the field work[31], (3) other additional information found on the website of parliaments, collected during fieldwork in Austria and Portugal. In both cases, the research activities were financed by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT), the Gulbenkian Foundation Fellowships for PhD Students and the Institute of Social Sciences – University of Lisbon. Moreover, they were developed in coordination with Universities, with which it was possible to establish an affiliation link as Visiting Researcher. Fieldwork in Austria lasted two months (September and October of 2018) and benefited from the support of the researchers at the Department of Political Science from University of Wien and also from the Institute for Advanced Studies in Wien, and of course from the Austrian Parliament. The field work in Wien resulted in eleven semi-structured interviews with parliamentary officials, experts on the topic and also MPs. The field work in Lisbon lasted two months (January and February of 2019) and resulted in thirteen semi-structured. Fieldwork in Portugal benefited mainly from the support of the Portuguese

[31] Each interview was audiotaped and transcribed verbatim.

Parliament. In total 24 interviews were conducted in both countries. Documental and archival research was also conducted in both parliaments.

The interviews altogether with the additional materials such as parliamentary reports and documents provided by the interviews, are intended to cover the aims, mechanisms and structures in place at parliaments, to assess the development and implementation of public engagement tools and activities, as a mean to disclose as well the causal factors explaining the different patterns of online engagement supply found in the parliaments selected for the case studies. Therefore, data from these multiple sources are then converged in the analysis process rather than handled individually. Thus, in this approach, each data source is one piece of the 'puzzle,' with each piece contributing to our understanding of the whole phenomenon. This convergence adds strength to the findings as the various strands of data are braided together to promote a greater understanding of the two cases in analysis (Baxter and Jack, 2008).

Having layout the overall structure of this study, the next chapter will present and discuss the definition and measurement of the main concept of this thesis.

CHAPTER III

DEFINING AND MEASURING ONLINE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

'Public engagement is not just desirable;
it is a condition of effective governance.'
Donald G. Lenihan
(Advisor on Public Engagement, Canada)

What tools and features are available on the websites of national parliaments to promote online public engagement? To answer this question, it is primarily important to define theoretically the concept of parliamentary public engagement; assess an empirical measure that operationalises the multidimensionality inherent to this concept; and explain the data collection and the methods employed in this thesis.

Hence, this chapter is divided into two main sections. Section 3.1 provides a theoretical definition of parliamentary public engagement, while the second section 3.2 explains the measurement procedures and techniques to operationalize parliament's online public engagement, which is inspired and adapted from Gibson and Ward's (2000) seminal work.

A multidimensional measurement tool is provided that addresses and acknowledges the complexities inherent to the public engagement concept. Its originality is based on its versatility, as it allows obtaining an overview of parliaments online public engagement supply, on one hand, and at the same time, disentangles the different ways of promoting engagement, such as informing, communicating and participating, and how much weight parliaments place on these.

This chapter also presents all the details on the data collection process and the websites' coding procedures, including the challenges and limitations of the research.

3.1 DEFINING (ONLINE) PARLIAMENTARY PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Public engagement is 'a buzzword of the twenty-first century' (Leston-Bandeira and Walker, 2018: 308). Across Europe, and elsewhere, parliaments have reinforced their mechanisms of contact with citizens, and public engagement has become a core element of parliamentary strategic planning. However, public engagement is a very broad and highly contested concept, and it is not always clear what it actually entails.

In discussing public engagement, it is important to acknowledge the complexities inherent to this highly debated concept (Firmstone and Coleman, 2015). Indeed, the term is used regularly to indicate distinct ideas. It refers to various notions of engagement, which ultimately may result in participation; but it is not necessarily about *actual* participation (Leston-Bandeira and Bender, 2013). In fact, the terms 'participation' and 'engagement' (with or without the prefix 'e-'), are frequently interchanged. Clearly, engagement and participation are strongly interrelated, but there is also an important difference between these two concepts. Aiming to draw a conceptual distinction between the two, scholars define political participation as an activity initiated by ordinary citizens who aim to influence political choices at any government level (van Deth, 2014). Typical examples include both conventional (e.g voting,) and non-conventional forms (e.g. signing petitions). While, engagement encompasses a relatively broad range of different forms, from passive to active forms of public engagement and political participation, including for instance 'having knowledge' and 'discussing politics' (Barrett and Brunton-Smith, 2014).

Therefore, we can define public engagement generically as 'a journey along a path from receipt of information to actual participation, and it can therefore assume both passive and active forms' (Leston-Bandeira and Walker, 2018). Thus, public engagement covers a very wide range of outlets and activities with different purposes, from information to participation, in public policy. This can include simply providing information or encouraging citizens to have a say in the decision making process. It refers, therefore, to different types of actions: passive and active forms of engagement. This is why the idea of a spectrum of engagement is often used to describe different forms of public engagement, which ultimately corresponds to different types of outcomes. Thus, from the point of view of parliaments promoting engagement is a multidimensional effort - is the step beyond participation; but of course promoting participation is still an important part of it (Norris, 2000).

Passive and active engagement

There are several existing taxonomies and typologies of public engagement. The most commonly used in public engagement theory and practice derives from Sherry R. Arnestein's 1969 academic paper 'A Ladder of Citizen Participation'. Since then, considerable derivations of Arnstein work have taken place in the literature, giving rise to similar categorizations. All of them reflect the same basic idea that one's options in selecting public engagement activities range along a spectrum from generally less to more active engagement from the public, even though they divide and label the classifications differently. Such is the case with the recently developed typologies to better understand the activity of parliamentary public engagement in the offline and online context (Kelso, 2007; Carman, 2009; Fox, 2009, Clark and Wilfor, 2012; Walker, 2012; Leston, Bandeira, 2014). It is safe to say that public engagement assumes both passive and active forms. Therefore, a ladder metaphor helps to illustrate the significant gradations of public engagement, which ultimately correspond to different types of outcomes (Leston-Bandeira and Walker, 2018). Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation has been influential in shaping the way academics and policy-makers think about engagement and participation (Tritter and McCallum 2006; Cornwall 2008). Its legacy is visible in the number of classifications of citizen engagement that view engagement as a process of varying degrees and steps, a technique Bishop and Davis (2002) have coined the 'continuum model'.[32] The continuum model has shaped much of the literature, notably through the two influential contributions of Sherry Arnstein (1969) and Carole Pateman (1970).

Sherry Arnstein was the first author to identify different steps in the process of engagement. Arnstein arranges types of participation on an eight-rung ladder based on the extent to which it enables citizens to exercise power and participate. Starting at the low level, from 'Manipulation', to the most participatory policies that encourage 'Citizen Control'. Arnstein (1969) places the eight rungs of the ladder into three broad categories 'Nonparticipation' (enables powerholders to educate or cure the participants), 'Tokenism' (informing citizens of their rights, responsibilities and options, and inviting citizen's opinions into the process) and 'Citizen Power' (enables them to negotiate and engage in trade-offs with traditional powerholders). Arnstein (1969) argues that as policies move up the ladder, they

[32] Overall, it is possible to group understandings of policy participation into four different approaches: participation as a continuum model (Arnstein, 1969; Pateman, 1970), approaches that link participation to policy problems (Thomas, 1993); a continuum of management techniques (Shand and Arnberg, 1996) and participation as a discontinuous interaction (Bishop and Davis, 2002).

progress from being 'shams' that are intended to make people think they have some say in public policy formulation (but do not actually provide the citizenry with any power) to policies that are specifically designed to integrate the public fully into the policy process.

Carole Pateman in her influential book, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (1970), offers a more nuanced analysis of similar issues. In particular, she pays greater attention to the relationship between participation and representative democracy. Like many democratic theorists, Pateman sees participation as essential for meaningful citizenship. She observes that participation gains little attention in most accounts of democracy. It is given 'only the most minimal role', sitting in the shadow of representative democracy in which electors decide between contending elites (Pateman 1970: 1). She distinguishes between pseudo, partial and full participation — from processes 'which offer the comfort of voice without real substance, through to those rare instances in which each participant can influence the outcome' (Pateman, 1970: 68–71).

Both these influential early works in the field have been strongly linked to direct democracy, where participation is only meaningful when it involves a real transfer of power from political institutions to citizens. While such transfer is at times possible within representative institutions, in most cases, ascending to the last form of participation, giving citizen control, would ultimately mean a replacement of parliaments (and MPs) in the process of making decision (Bishop and Davis, 2002). As Painter clearly sums up:

> *'The idea of direct democracy proposes a more continuous, active role for citizens. Theorists who call for the implementation of such an idea are proposing much more significant levels of participation than prevail in a representative democracy, through such institutional mechanisms as direct local assemblies or the extensive use of referenda'* (Painter, 1992: 22).

However, there is no agreement about the nature of citizen involvement in policy processes. Opinions differ about what might constitute 'real' participation, and if such participation displaces existing representative institutions or simply extends dialogue into a range (Bishop and Davis, 2002). Furthermore, there are still questions of levels of the degree of power sharing, and of the relationship between traditional representative institutions and new consultative processes.

Given the problematic normative nature of Arnstein's article - only the top three rungs of the ladder are considered appropriate forms of participation, in which the citizen control is the apogee - later developments of Arnstein's idea have been to some extent 'managerialised'

(Bishop and Davis, 2002; Dean, 2017). Nowadays, participation has become one aspect of a set of tools for public managers and institutions to use, and citizen control was replaced by delegation, which can also imply situations in which decision making is handed over to the community or to stakeholders. (Bishop and Davis, 2002; Catt and Murphy, 2003; Stewart, 2009). This means that public participation is now seen as an addition to the representative processes instead of its replacement (EIPP, 2009).

Other limitations have been pointed to Arnstein's *continuum model*. This conceptualization implies that a full range of choices are available to decision makers, when options may be limited by the policy issue at hand (Bishop and Davis, 2002). Furthermore, it also raises questions about how these forms of engagement relate to each other. Leston-Bandeira and Walker (2018) gave us an example: do people need to be informed and educated about parliament in order to participate in specific activities? Also, Firmstone and Coleman (2015) pointed out that such varied conceptions of what citizen engagement might mean raise problems for evaluation of the effectiveness of strategies.

Regardless of their limitations, taken together, these two works represent major contributions to the field by showing that participation in policy choices should be understood as points along a continuum, and also by highlighting the fact that engagement raises questions of power or, in the practical sense, issues of control (Edwards, 2008). Furthermore, the critique turned on by Arnstein and Pateman develops an important conceptual innovation: an implicit continuum. As processes travel across the spectrum, the degree of engagement increases from the perfunctory to the meaningful. It makes engagement not a single act, but a range of possibilities.

3.1.1 Adapting a revised continuum model to parliaments

More recently, this idea of a process of engagement or of different gradients of involvement has been developed to better understand the activity of parliamentary public engagement in the offline and online context (Kelso, 2007; Carman, 2009; Fox, 2009, Clark and Wilford, 2012; Walker, 2012; Leston, Bandeira, 2014). Some of these works have developed and applied a more realistic model of user involvement, 'moving beyond the dichotomies of representative versus other, inclusion versus exclusion, that are Asntein's focus, and thus 'avoiding the snakes' as Tritter and McCallum (2006: 165) would say.

Carman (2009) and Leston-Bandeira (2014) used the ladder of Arnstein in similar ways to create and stratify new models of public engagement, where at the lowest level, parliaments simply provide a system of information transmission, and at the highest-level, parliaments integrate the citizenry in the policy making decision by leading the process.

Carman (2009) distinguishes four steps in a wider process of engagement: 1) *Information transmission and provision,* 2) *Information exchange,* 3) *Public participation* and 4) *Public control*. The first step refers to the provision of one-way presentation of information, where the institution presents information to the citizenry on their rights and responsibilities. In Arnstein's ladder this would fall under the category of 'tokenism'. Slightly further up on Carman's ladder systems allow for the exchange of information between the political institutions and the mass citizenry. At this stage, interested individuals and civil society organizations provide input into the policy making process. Whilst these mechanisms that allow the two-way flow of information between the citizenry and institutions are an improvement of the first stage, information exchange remains a limited form of public engagement. Slightly further up on Carman's ladder are the systems and mechanisms designed to foster public participation, whereby concerned citizens and civil society organizations are able to become directly involved in the policy making process, even though the final decision taking authority remains with the political institution. Finally, the last step on Carman's ladder is '*Public control*', through which citizens not only participate, but hold the final decision. However, there are very few mechanisms that establish the mass public as the final decision taker on matters of public policy or law. And again, this last step is problematic, given it is not realistic in the context of representative democracies.

While Carman distinguishes four steps, Leston-Bandeira (2014) develops a fivefold framework of public engagement: 1) *Information,* 2) *Understanding,* 3) *Identification,* 4) *Participation,* and 5) *Intervention.* From this perspective, citizens need a certain amount of '*Information'* about the institution and MPs to support their ability to act and react in a political world. Then, citizens engage with this information developing an '*Understanding'* of the parliament (the understanding can be at its simplest form, such as recognizing the difference between legislature and executive). Slightly further up is *'Identification*', whereby citizens not only understand the parliament, but can also recognize its relevance and are able to link parliamentary activity to their own lives and experiences. In the final two steps, there is 'Participation', through which citizens feel compelled to participate in a parliamentary output to act on issues that matters to them, and *'Intervention',* whereby citizens not only participate,

but they also lead the process and engage with parliamentarians in the discussion that contributes to a parliamentary decision. This last stage is far more realistic than the' *Public control*' stage in Carman's model, it gives citizens the possibility to intervene in the decision process but not to control it.

While Carman's and Leston-Bandeira's conceptualizations establish multiple points in a continuum model, the Hansard Society (2011b) determines a framework for engagement with only two overarching processes: first, the education process through which individuals obtain information and understanding about the parliament, then, the participation through which citizens actually contribute in parliamentary matters. Likewise, other authors have highlighted the importance of information and education. Fox (2009) and Walker (2012) identify the lack of knowledge on parliament and political literacy as the first challenge that public engagement must face. They believe that public engagement 'has to start with fairly basic education and information' (Walker, 2012: 270), and to be meaningful and sustainable, political engagement and participation 'needs to be built on the foundations of a more informed public' (Fox, 2009: 684). Looking at the case of the Northern Ireland assembly public engagement and outreach strategy, Clark and Wilford (2012) have also identified educational programs targeting children and young people as a paramount foundation for engagement.

The idea of different gradients of involvement means that diverse tools may suit distinct steps of the engagement process. While a variety of studies have focused on specific areas and outputs of parliamentary public engagement – especially those that integrate citizen's views into parliamentary activities, such as with new media and e-petitions (for example, Setälä and Grönlund, 2006; Dai and Norton, 2007; Carman, 2009, 2010; Fox, 2009; Joshi and Rosenfield, 2013, Bochel, 2013; Lindner and Riehm, 2009; Riehm et al., 2014) – we still know little about the overall process of public engagement activities, especially in the online context.

Table 3.2 Comparison of public engagement models

Arnstein's ladder (1969)	*Carman's model (2010)*	*Leston-Bandeira's framework (2014)*
1. Manipulation	1. Information transmission and provision	1.Information
2. Therapy	2. Information exchange	2.Understanding
3. Informing	3. Public participation	3. Identification
4. Consultation	4. Public control	4. Participation
5. Placation		5. Intervention
6. Partnership		
7. Delegated power		
8. Citizen control		

The idea of a process of engagement along different gradients of involvement is present in the three approaches summarized in Table 3.1. These frameworks capture the central issue of recognizing different intensities of public engagement options, however the number of categorizations, and the sometimes abstract wording, appears to have made it difficult for these insights to have a widespread use. Therefore, it is easy to become tangled in the fine-grained differentiations and terminologies when it comes to the phenomena of public engagement (Rucker, 2016).

Contrary to Arnstein model, Carman's (2009) and Leston-Bandeira's (2014) frameworks were developed to specifically capture the public engagement supply of parliaments. Since then, Leston-Bandeira's (2014) approach has been used to assess the resources being dedicated to the expansion of the services and activities of public engagement online and offline. Building up on these models, a few studies have looked at parliamentary websites (PWs) and social media to evaluate in what extent are parliaments promoting public engagement (Bernardes and Leston-Bandeira, 2016; Barros et al, 2016). Since the early 2000s, the introduction of ICTs has enabled the enrichment of parliaments' 'menu of participation choices' (Dalton, 2006, p.2). Nowadays, the Internet plays a key role in opening parliaments up, in particular by providing information, mainly through websites, which otherwise would be extremely hard to find (Norris, 2001; Setälä and Grönlund, 2006; Griffith and Leston-Bandeira, 2012c).

Expanding on these ideas, *online public engagement* is defined as a range of actions supported by information and communication technologies, which are specifically targeted at the public and support a number of initiatives, such as the provision of information or the 'top-

down' engagement of citizens. These initiatives are promoted by the parliament to convey citizens' needs and opinions to elected representatives, so that they can collaborate in the parliamentary activities rather than just being consumers of it.

3.2 MEASURING (ONLINE) PARLIAMENTARY PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Online public engagement is a multifaceted domain that includes many different activities and outlets, from top- down distribution of information (passive engagement) to bottom- up user feedback, to many- to- many communication among citizens (active engagement).

To address these issues, this thesis assesses the extent to which official Parliamentary Websites (PWs) provide opportunities for online public engagement, and deliver these activities and features in an accessible and efficient way. Although social media is increasingly gaining more importance in digital politics (Bimber and Copeland, 2013), studying public engagement supply through an analysis of institutional websites is the most appropriate research approach for at least three reasons.

First, websites are especially relevant for parliaments since they 'have become the main window of parliament to the outside world'[33] (Bernardes and Leston-Bandeira, 2016: 91). Websites have become one of parliaments' most important channels of communication, especially given the continued decline of traditional media coverage (Leston-Bandeira and Ward, 2008; Zittel, 2003). PWs 'can be bridges of representative democracy—by connecting politically interested citizens to themselves, to their communities, or to alternative forms of political participation' (Theiner et al., 2018: 80). Whilst the audience may still be a minority one and skewed towards the politically interested (Ibid), using a website, parliaments can inform the public about political decisions, while abstaining from judgment and valuation. Therefore, communication by the parliament as an institution 'can therefore contribute significantly to societal integration and political education' (Theiner et al., 2018: 80). Specially for specific groups in society, for instance 'websites do provide a window on parliamentary activity particularly for younger citizens' (Leston-Bandeira and Ward, 2008: 49).

[33] Digital media continues to help parliaments to open up and demystify its work to the public, such as television has done for so many years by starting to broadcast what happened in parliaments (Walker, 2012).

Their growing importance can also be seen in the rapid increase in visitors to parliamentary website (Ibid). Through official websites, parliamentary activity can be viewed by anyone, anywhere, and at any time, in a variety of different formats. Whereas with social media, individuals that are not in social networks are automatically excluded. Furthermore, social media platforms constrain the type of message and the content itself, limitating the relationship parliaments can build with the public.

Second, PWs work as 'windows' not only to the public but also for researchers. The assessment of parliaments' supply of online engagement opportunities starts at the parliamentary website, but continues to other websites, portals, Web archives, and social media accounts, if necessary, in order to find the information, feature or activity being analysed. PWs are the starting point, and, in fact, most of the information and features being researched were on the websites; however, sometimes it was necessary to visit other portals, whenever the main PW directed to it.

Third, official websites are by no means one-dimensional spaces that allow one to observe only a limited set of political functions (Vaccari, 2013). Rather, they can develop into broad hubs that encompass different types of activities and outlets, from the most passive to the most involving, from the most targeted to the most inclusive. Institutional websites integrate many different sets of features that this analysis can not evaluate individually, but also map in order to identify relevant clusters of activities. As will be shown below, tools, activities, and features, of public engagement on official websites can be grouped on the basis of the three main dimensions of 1. information, 2. communication and interactive multimedia, and 3. consultation and participation. To the extent that different causal factors explain the development of these specific dimensions of parliaments' online engagement supply, such causal patterns might also apply to social media and other online tools that can perform comparable functions.

Many of the studies analysing parliaments' websites have not been concerned with measuring their public engagement activities; instead, they are more interested in measuring how parliaments are adapting to ICT overall. At the same time, some of the studies on parliaments' public engagement have not been concerned with the online context, which is why this study is so innovative, and therefore, might contribute to fill some of the current gaps in the field.

Hence, this analysis draws inspiration from previous similar studies (Norris 2002; Trechsel et al., 2003; Triga and Milioni, 2014; Setälä and Grönlund, 2006; Sobaci, 2010;

Bernardes and Leston-Bandeira, 2016). Specifically, it involves a four-stage analytical process adapted from Gibson and Ward (2002) that includes: 1) defining the concepts of public engagement (and activities); 2) operationalising variables that measure those concepts and activities; 3) coding websites for the presence or absence of these features; and 4) developing indices to measure how parliaments perform the identified activities.

Many researchers have relied on Gibson and Ward's approach to analyse different political websites, including political party websites (e.g. Vaccari, 2013) and PWs (e.g., Norris, 2003; Trechsel et al., 2003). Each study has employed different coding frameworks and applied indices that measure different concepts and dimensions, thus making it difficult to compare results across studies, let alone countries. Furthermore, we seek to move beyond predetermined composite indices to analyse websites content, towards a more solid and grounded method. If one of the fundamental questions being asked about these websites is whether they have an underlying logic or purpose, applying indexes made up of various policy items would seem to prejudge the answer to that question (Gibson and Ward, 2000). Therefore, a broad qualitative meta-analysis of previous studies was conducted to fulfil the first, second and third step of the analytical process.

Second, this analysis based on the content of websites is extended, since it looks at the websites' performance, i.e. the delivery of the content and features of public engagement. This second analysis is composed by a range of components such as usability, accessibility, and responsiveness. In doing so, this study draws a clear distinction between a website's content and its form, or how effectively a website delivers its contents; which is quite an important aspect to take into account when studying the provision of public engagement activities.

Following the four-stage analytical process, two methods were employed: a qualitative meta-analysis of previous coding frames and a manual quantitative content analysis of the PWs. First, the meta-analysis will be presented, and the websites' coding after.

3.2.1 A qualitative meta-analysis

The meta-analysis of previous coding frames was conducted with four goals: to define the concepts, select the variables, group the variables, build composite indices, and finally, turn the methodology and findings as comparable as possible with other relevant studies in the field. This procedure allowed to rigorously select 40 variables, and more importantly, conceded the aggregation of variables and the building of composite indices in a reliable way to perform the analysis.

Most indices employed in previous studies, which followed Gibson and Ward's proposal, were derived from combinations between variables (*e.g.*, grouping the background history of parliament and the provision of official documents under the rubric of *information*) that were based on *face validity*, that is, on how each researcher interpreted the meanings of these categories. However, Gibson and Ward (2002) recommended that scholars abstain from prejudging the dimensions of website functions, and instead adopt 'a more flexible method that allows the website to speak for themselves.' However, due to the impossibility of using dimension reduction statistical techniques to identify groups of empirically correlated variables, as this requires an *n* of at least 100, a qualitative meta-analysis of the coding frames and indices employed in relevant previous studies of parliaments websites was performed to overcome this issue[34].

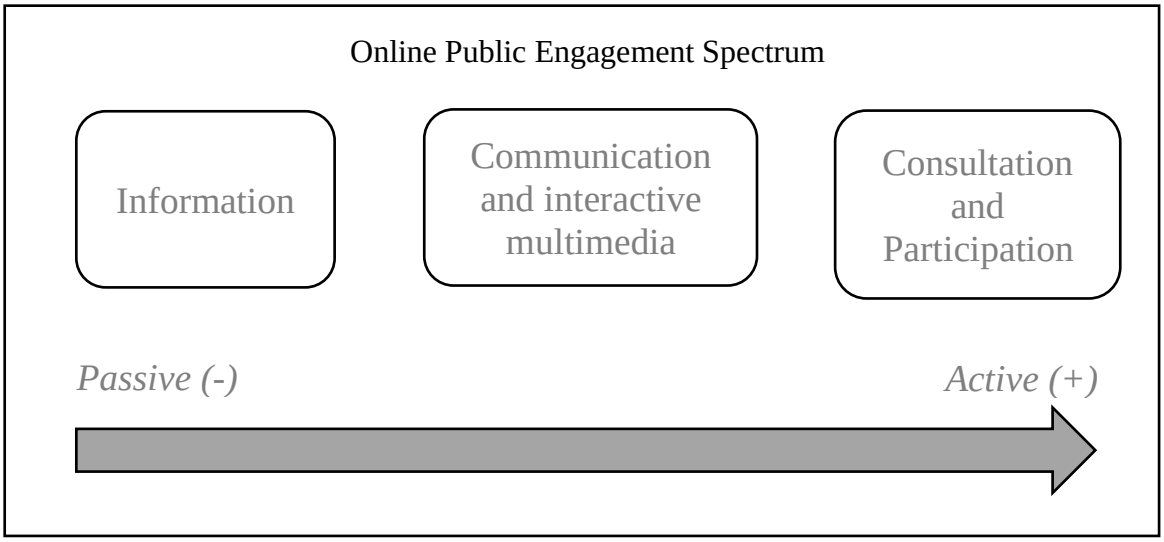
Six coding frames were meta-analysed. The selection of these was based on various criteria: visibility and diffusion of the publications where they appeared; relevance of the scholars that produced them; significance of the theoretical approach; the geographical reach of the countries analysed; and originality of the coding frame. This procedure led to the selection of six coding frames, which were employed in the following studies: Norris (2001); Trechsel et al. (2003)/Triga and Milioni (2014), Setälä and Grönlund (2006); IPU (2009); Sobaci (2010); and Bernardes and Leston-Bandeira (2016)[35].

Through the meta-analysis, it was possible to identify 40 variables and three main dimensions/steps of public engagement emerged: 1. *Information*, 2. *Communication and interactive multimedia*, and 3. *Consultation and participation*, which represent different forms of public engagement from more passive to more active ones, as represented in figure 3.0.1.

[34] The authors even stressed that when none other options are available, 'then the methodology does not preclude the construction of composite indices (the approach used in most contemporary studies)' (Gibson and Ward, 2000: 315).

[35] A recent study on PWs of European national parliaments has been published while this thesis was being developed. Unfortunately, the study of Theiner et al. published in late 2018 was not considered for the meta-analysis, since the meta-analysis, as well the data collection, was performed between 2017 and 2018. Nevertheless, all the 14 variables included in the Theiner et al (2018) study coincide with the selected variables from the meta-analysis.

Figure 3. 1 Online Public Engagement Spectrum



Information

The first dimension highlighted by the meta-analysis was *information*. As Table 3.2 shows, all the coding frames clearly used a dimension of information, even though the labels aren't exactly the same through the six coding frames. Table 3. 2 summarises the results of the meta-analysis process, by which twenty variables[36] were identified, that capture the degree to which PWs provide general information concerning parliamentary activities, information about the everyday lives and political activities of MPs, information on debates, committee meetings, laws and the provision of education and political literacy.

As many scholars have consistently pointed out, information provision, even if only one-way, is an invaluable tool that civic society organizations and members of the citizenry may use to help them hold their leading institutions to account for decisions taken (or not taken). This is an essential precondition for public engagement and a cornerstone on which citizens' engagement rests (OECD, 2009). According to Coleman et al. (1999: 365) '*the successful functioning of any parliamentary democracy is dependent upon efficient, multi-directional flows of information'*. A multi-directional flow of information is both a right and a

[36] The meta-analysis resulted in twenty-one variables, however only twenty variables will be further used in the content analysis of the PWs. The variable regarding the provision of 'committees work documents and reports' was found in four of the six coding frames. However, further in the analysis, to achieve an acceptable reliability for the composite index measuring 'information supply', this variable was removed. For clarity sake it was also removed from the Table of the meta-analysis.

need for a parliamentary democracy to function in a reliable manner (Mulder, 1999). Back in 1989, Philip Laundy already highlighted that 'parliaments throughout the world are more conscious than ever before of their duty to keep the public informed' (1989: 131). Related to the provision of information, it is also important to capture the delivery of education and political literacy programs, since both are necessary basis for better approach to engagement and understanding. As Walter Bagehot in 1867 stressed, the 'teaching function' of the British House of Commons, given its responsibility 'to express the mind of the English people on all matters which come before it'. Many more matters come before Parliaments today than when Bagehot wrote those words, and far more attention is paid to the public's right to know.

The rationale beyond this dimension is that citizens need information for making an informed 'public participation' when invited to contribute in the deliberative process. Moreover, citizens lead busy lives and want to access information at their own convenience, which ICT could provide in multiple ways. Considering the assertion that the cost and accessibility of political information are related to citizens' level of engagement with political affairs: the lower the cost and higher the accessibility of political information, the higher the aggregate level of citizen engagement (Bimber, 2001). Therefore, ICTs could reduce greatly the costs of information both for who provided and for who consumes it, and by doing that, it is boosting citizen's engagement on parliaments' work. In a simple and gradual manner, ICTs could have a large and important role on providing access to different kinds of information electronically (Poland, 2001)[37]. Reporting on debates, committee meetings and laws approved/in discussion are just a few examples of how parliaments could engage citizens in their work just by providing important information. An online portal or website is a good tool to file important documents and material relevant for online consultation and simple to find. In fact, a growing amount of information about parliamentary institutions and the legislative process is already being made available on the Internet and PWs have already become a virtual face of parliaments (Dai and Norton, 2007). Using ICTs to disseminate information, parliaments have the opportunity to enhance parliaments' transparency and legitimate their work by publicizing it to citizens, building a positive image in the eyes of the public and 'marketing' themselves to the public (Sobaci, 2010; Dai and Norton, 2007).

[37] There is a clear difference between providing simple access and accessibility. It is not necessarily easy for citizens to know where relevant information is located. For instance, search engines can facilitate this, but these typically result in long lists of, often, irrelevant information.

Besides the simple provision of information, education and political literacy play an important role […] 'in order to tackle the knowledge and interest deficit that so bedevils public engagement' (Fox, 2009: 681).The idea is that providing education about parliament is a necessary basis for a better approach to engagement and understanding: the more people know about Parliament and how it works, the more likely they are to engage with it (Kelso, 2007). Recent research from Hansard Society, based in Australia, UK, Chile and Canada, shows that parliamentarians, parliamentary officials, and members of the public, agree and feel that education plays a key role in helping to bridge the gap between elected representatives and the public (Williamson and Fallon, 2011). Their findings show that political literacy has an important role, increasing the trust of citizens in their knowledge of how the political system works, which is essential for citizens be able to engage effectively in the process (Ibid).

Therefore, the argument is that the foundation for political engagement starts by providing information and endorsing and promoting political literacy and education to citizens, including specific content to young people. Several studies have shown that young people in most of western democracies are underrepresented, disconnected and aliened from the political process (see Henn and Foard, 2014). In fact, the engagement strategy of the Northern Ireland Assembly has identified that an educational program is a key investment priority to promote engagement, targeting children and young people. Promoting schools' visits to the Assembly and establishing an advisory 'Youth Forum', designed to meet on a quarterly basis in the Assembly, for example, to 'consider, debate and make recommendations on issues of particular importance to young people' (Clark and Wilford, 2012: 387).

Furthermore, the Hansard Society's Citizenship Education Programme has found that when political education is delivered well, and when young people are offered opportunities to get involved in the political process, they do so enthusiastically and find the experience rewarding. Studies have shown that young people acquire civic attitudes and behaviours not just from being educated about citizenship through the formal curriculum, but also by putting citizenship into practice (Kerr, 1999). Regarding this issue, parliaments have the ability to develop experimental learning activities using the support that information and communications technologies can offer. These are not just means to perform better in existing jobs: they present opportunities for redefining the way parliaments engage with citizens.

Table 3.2 Meta-Analysis of six coding frames: Information

Variable	*Norris, 2001*	*Trechsel et al, 2003/ Triga and Milioni, 2014*	*Setälä and Grönlund, 2006*	*IPU, 2009*	*Sobaci, 2010*	*Bernardes and Leston-Bandeira, 2016*
Description of parliamentary bodies and functions	Information	General Information	Information	General Information	General Information	
Virtual tour/panorama of the parliament		General Information		General Information	General Information	
Information regarding how to visit the parliament				General Information		
Schedule of current and planned parliamentary activities and events				General Information		
Full-text search tool		Usability	Interactivity	General Inf.		
Advertisement of cultural events online				General Information		
Guide (e.g. factsheet or summary) of the legislative process		Information on Legislation		Information about Legislation, Budget, and Oversight		
Search facility for pending or ongoing legislation	Information	Information on Legislation		Information about Legislation etc	Access to Important Legal Texts	
Guide (e.g. factsheet or summary) on the role of members		MPs Information		General Information		
A list of members		MPs Information	Information	General Inf.	Parliamentarians	Information

Biographies of all MPs	MPs Information	Information	General Inf.	Parliamentarians	Information
MP s recording Votes	MPs Information	Legislation	General Information		Information
Guide (e.g. factsheet or summary) on the role of committees	Committee Information		General Information		
List of committees	Committee Information	Information	General Information		Information on Legislation
Committees membership		Information	General Information		Information on Legislation
Schedule of Parliament debates	Parliament/Senate Debates Inform.	Legislation	General Information	Access to Important Legal Texts	
Text search tool for debates	Parliament/Senate Debates Inform.		General Information		
Option to download the debates or to request it			Oversight		
List of written questions			Information about Legislation, etc		
Information on educational activities/target to schools or young people and/or games	General Information				Interaction

Communication and interactive multimedia

The second group of variables identified through the meta-analysis falls under the label *communication and interactive multimedia tools*. In total, eleven[38] variables were identified to measure the features introduced by Web 2.0, which is facilitating new and dispersed networks of peer-to-peer contact and new interactivity features. Links to social media, audio or video archives of committee meetings[39], and parliaments' mobile applications, are just a few examples of variables included in this dimension.

Contrary to the information supply dimension, this one anchors the idea that parliamentary public engagement is not only a matter of enabling 'outsiders' to see what is going on in parliament (which is mainly captured by the *information* dimension), but is also about using communication and multimedia technology to enable better models of 'knowledge exchange' between the work of parliament and wider social networks (Hansard Society, 2005), including multimedia features to enhance users-computer interaction. Hence, *communication and interactive multimedia* are defined as features that allow a multi-directional dialogue with visitors, the possibility for visitors to interact with each other and the website host or MPs, and to give feedback. The possibility to give feedback is at the core of the democratic potential of the Internet (OECD, 2009). This is what Hacker called 'political interactivity', which *'means two-way communication about issues raised from any level to any other level'* and its *'purpose is the co-creation of political perceptions and policies'* (1996: 225)[40]. Interactive communication creates greater symmetry in communication between leaders and citizens and shifts the balance of power between citizens and parliaments (Hacker, 1996). In fact, at least theoretically, when discussing the possibilities for representative institutions tackling issues of

[38] The meta-analysis resulted in twelve variables, however only eleven variables will be further used in the content analysis of the PWs. The variable regarding the provision of 'email address to contact the parliamentary groups' was found in three of the six coding frames. However, further in the analysis, to achieve an acceptable reliability for the composite index measuring 'communication and interactive multimedia', this variable was removed. For clarity sake it was also removed from the Table of the meta-analysis.

[39] One might wonder if the 'access to an audio or video archive from the committee meetings' can be considered 'Communication and interactive multimedia' or simple 'information supply'? However, there is a substantial and theoretical difference between providing information through text formats and providing audio and video content, which requires a set of multimedia resources and higher investment from parliaments. Besides, the presence/absence of these tools on PWs' reveal (or not) a more sophisticated and active level of investment in engagement.

[40] http://Web.nmsu.edu/~comstudy/pc2.htm

deficient legitimacy and disengagement, several researchers point to the potential of a more communicative and interactive practice of political representation (Margetts, 2001; Astrom, 2004; Coleman, 2005, 2007; Coleman and Blumler, 2009; Williamson 2009; Coleman, 2017)[41]. A more intensive interaction between the public and political figures and institutions may reduce the sense of alienation, and thereby the political disengagement, by making parliaments able to respond to their constituents (Sola Pool, 1998; Coleman, 2017).

Studies have shown the importance of interactivity features in websites in political contexts, since higher levels of interactivity result in more positive evaluations of the website and the content that is presented. For example, Sundar et al. (2003) found that moderate levels of interactivity on party websites lead to more positive assessments of the political candidates. Other studies focused on cognitive responses to interactivity and demonstrated that higher levels of interactivity result in more favourable responses. Website visitors seem to retain more of what they have seen on websites that are relatively interactive (Van Noort, 2012). Likewise, Tedesco (2007) found that exposure to interactive websites increases the likelihood that an individual values voting as an important engagement activity. The same happens for social media accounts, a study of Lee and Shin (2012) found that exposure to social media accounts that uses interactive communication affects candidate evaluations, which can lead to stronger voting intentions among citizens who usually avoid social interaction.

Overall, previous research argues that exposure to interactive multimedia features on a website can benefit political engagement because of the opportunity for two-way communication. Direct and reciprocal communication without intermediaries may enhance feelings of closeness and intimacy with politics (Lee and Shin, 2012), which may consequently affect citizens' political engagement. With systems and mechanisms designed to communicate and interact with citizens, concerned citizens and civil society organizations are able to become directly involved in the parliamentary work and are closer to participate in the policy-making. At this stage, interested individuals and civil society organizations should be able to communicate and interact with their representatives through email, be part of a mailing list, watch debates and committees, and follow parliament in social media.

[41] It is important, however, to stress that these scholars don't claim that the Internet 'makes things happen', but they have sought ways of exploiting it in the service of democratic agency.

Table 3.3 Meta-analysis of six coding frames: Communication and interactive multimedia

Variable	*Norris, 2001*	*Trechsel et al, 2003/ Triga and Milioni, 2014*	*Setälä and Grönlund, 2006*	*IPU, 2009*	*Sobaci, 2010*	*Bernardes and Leston-Bandeira, 2016*
Audio or video archive of plenary meeting		Parliament/Senate Debates Information		Tools: Finding, Receiving, and Viewing Information (1)	Webcasting and Videos	Information on Legislation
Audio or video broadcast and/or webcast (streaming) of plenary meetings		Parliament/Senate Debates Information		Tools: Finding, Receiving (1)	Webcasting and Videos	Information on Legislation
Audio or video archive of Committees meeting		Committee Information		Tools: Finding, Receiving (1)		
Audio or video broadcast and/or webcast (streaming) of Committees meetings		Committee Information		Tools: Finding, Receiving (1)		
Blogs from parliamentary bodies				Tools: Communication and Dialogue with Citizens (2)		Interaction
Links to Social media						Interaction

Alerting service or a weekly or monthly newsletter/bulletin		General Interaction		Tools: Finding, Receiving (1)		Interaction
Email address to contact the committees	Communication	Information		Tools: Communication and Dialogue (2)		Interaction
Email address to contact the MPs	Communication	MPs Information	Interactivity	Tools: Communication and Dialogue (2)	Communication services	Interaction
Links to MPs external and personal Websites	Communication	MPs Information		General Information		Information
A mobile application of the parliament				Tools: Finding, Receiving, and Viewing (1)		

Consultation and participation

The last group of variables identified through the meta-analysis concerns the supply of consultative and/or participatory tools and features, as a last, and more active, step in the process of engagement. A total of nine variables were identified in the six coding frames. This dimension captures the ultimate step in the continuum model of public engagement, where it is expected that parliaments promote political and civic participation opportunities in the decision making process in order to actively engage their citizens.

There is a broad consensus on the view that political participation is one of the cornerstones of a well-functioning democracy (Barber, 1984; Pateman, 1976; Verba et al., 1995).). According to democratic theories, democracy 'requires a politically active citizenry' (Weldon and Dalton, 2014: 113), and active involvement in public affairs and in decision making processes produces checks and balances in political activities. Thereby increasing transparency and legitimating the process and its outputs. In this model, the final decision still remains with the political institution, but individuals are able to have meaningful input in the political process of developing policies that can legitimize a program or a policy, its purposes, implementation and leadership (Milakovich, 2010).

Considering that the nature of political participation is transforming, and traditional repertoires have been replaced by new forms, many of them using ICT and Internet (Dalton, 2006; Inglehart and Welzel, 2005; Stolle and Micheletti, 2013), parliaments currently have the opportunity to be part of this change and to foster political participation on the decision making process. This dimension captures in which ways, and to what extent, are parliaments adapting to ICT to promote e-petitions, online surveys, online opinion polls on a given issue at a certain moment in time, online policy consultations, or enabling interested citizens to submit evidences to an inquiry.

In this step we expect a relationship based on partnership with the parliament in which citizens are consulted and might actively engage in defining the process and content of policy making. By doing this, parliaments acknowledge an equal standing for citizens in setting the agenda, although the responsibility for the final decision rests with the institution.

Table 3.4 Meta-analysis of six coding frames: Consultation and participation

Variable	*Norris, 2001*	*Trechsel et al, 2003/ Triga and Milioni, 2014*	*Setälä and Grönlund, 2006*	*IPU, 2009*	*Sobaci, 2010*	*Bernardes and Leston-Bandeira, 2016*
Online surveys or opinion polls (closed answers)	Communication	Consultation/Participation - Interactivity	Interactivity	Tools: Communication and Dialogue with Citizens (1)	Online participation services	Interaction
Online conferences/debates between MPs and citizens (With reply)					Online participation services	
Online advisory committees		Consultation/Part. - Interactivity				
Online citizens/discussion fora	Communication	Consultation/Part. - Interactivity	Interactivity	Tools: Communication (1)	Online participation services	Interaction
Option to submit online evidence to an inquiry		Feedback/Comments - Interactivity				
Possibility to comment bills drafts						Interaction
Possibility to do suggestions of issues for debate or bills suggestions		Feedback/Comments - Interactivity				Interaction

E-petitions system	Tools: Communication (1)	Communication services	Interaction
Possibility to vote online on a specific public issue to be adopted		Online participation services	

3.2.1.1 Selected variables

During the meta-analysis, two questions needed to be answered: which variables to select and how to group the variables in a meaningful way?

To answer the first question, all the variables previously included in the six coding frames being meta-analysed are included. The selection rule was based on the variables' relevance i.e. a variable which was found more often in the six coding frames. However, given that some of the chosen coding frames are slightly outdated; and to ensure the coding frame takes into account all the innovative features rapidly brought by recent advancements in technology, pertinent variables that have been included in only a few coding frames in the past were also analysed. For instance, the presence or absence of links to social media pages in parliaments' websites was only found in one of the six coding frames (Bernardes and Leston-Bandeira, 2016); however, social media has become an important part of Internet nowadays and therefore it is extremely important to assess if parliaments are using social media or not. The same happened with the variable 'a mobile application of the parliament' which was only present in the IPU (2009); however, since most Europeans use mobile phones to access Internet (mobile phones or smart phones were the device most used to surf the internet, by over 79% of internet users in 2016)[42] it is important to evaluate if parliaments provide their citizens this tool.

For the second question, the analysis resorted to the majority rule to resolve discrepancies in the ways in which different scholars classified the same or similar variables. However, in some cases there were some disagreements in the ways different scholars had classified the same variable. And it was not always possible to resort to the majority rule among their stipulations.[43] Especially, more divergences were found in the consultation and participation dimensions. Sometimes, there was no clear majority, or it was ambiguous how to distinguish a participatory tool from an interactive tool. However, drawing on the works of McMillan (2002) and Ferber et al (2007), which stress different levels of receiver control (website users) within models of cyber-communication and cyber-interaction, it was possible

[42] Source: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/7771139/9-20122016-BP-EN.pdf

[43] The variables where the majority rule was not used were: 'Full-text search tool'; 'Audio or video archive of plenary meeting'; 'Audio or video broadcast and/or webcast (streaming) of plenary meetings'; 'Audio or video archive of Committees meeting'; 'Audio or video broadcast and/or webcast (streaming) of Committees meetings'; 'Links to MPs external and personal Websites'; 'Online citizens/discussion fora'; 'Possibility to do suggestions of issues for debate or bills suggestions'; 'E-petitions system'

to navigate these issues. Hence, this typology distinguishes interactive tools and features with low receiver control from those with higher receiver control, i.e. website users' control. Therefore, features and tools provided to communicate, but which have low receiver control and in which some interaction is allowed – such as the inclusion of multimedia elements that improve the user's ability to interact with the system (McMillan, 2002) – were considered separately from those with high receiver control in which there are opportunities for citizens' participation. Despite the fact many tools in the second dimension are classified as characteristic of Web 2.0, they offer a process-based form of interactivity with websites instead of a human-to-human form of interactivity that facilitates participation – which is captured by the third dimension (Stromer-Galley, 2004; Lilleker and Malagon, 2010)[44].

Hence, this process resulted in the selection of 40 variables, and additionally on their aggregation in three main dimensions of public engagement: 1. *Information supply*, 2. *Communication and interactive multimedia tools*, and 3. *Consultation and participation tools.* This partially new measure of online public engagement supply provides different angles of analysis and easily travels across different political systems and countries. Moreover, despite the changes introduced, this measure allows some degree of comparison with existing frames since it includes some of the variables that have been integrated in previous measures. Table 3.0.5 presents the selected variables that will be used to proceed with the content analysis of parliaments' websites, which will be explained in the next section.

[44] For instance, the provision of 'online surveys and opinion polls' were classified by some scholars as 'communication' or 'interactivity/interaction' (Norris 2001; Setälä and Grönlund 2006; and Leston-Bandeira 2016). However, although they are interactive, online surveys and polls should be classified as consultation and participation tools, as they offer effective opportunities to consult and hear people's voices, distinguishing them from other communication tools.

Table 3.5 Selected variables for the coding scheme (content)

#	**Information Variables**
1	Description of parliamentary bodies and functions
2	Virtual tour/panorama of the parliament
3	Information regarding how to visit the parliament
4	Schedule of current and planned parliamentary activities and events
5	Full-text search tool
6	Advertisement of cultural events online
7	Guide (e.g. factsheet or summary) of the legislative process
8	Search facility for pending or ongoing legislation
9	Guide (e.g. factsheet or summary) on the role of members
10	A list of members
11	Biographies of all MPs
12	MPs recording Votes
13	Guide (e.g. factsheet or summary) on the role of committees
14	List of committees
15	Committees membership
16	Schedule of parliament debates
17	Text search tool for debates
18	Option to download the debates or to request it
19	List of written questions
20	Information on educational activities/target to schools or young people and/or games
	Communication and Interactive multimedia Variables
21	Audio or video archive of plenary meeting
22	Audio or video broadcast and/or webcast (streaming) of plenary meetings
23	Audio or video archive of Committees meeting
24	Audio or video broadcast and/or webcast (streaming) of Committees meetings
25	Blogs from parliamentary bodies
26	Links to Social media
27	Links to MPs external and personal websites
28	A mobile application of the parliament
29	Alerting service or a weekly or monthly newsletter/bulletin
30	Email address to contact the committees
31	Email address to contact the MPs
	Consultation and Participation Variables
32	Online surveys or opinion polls (closed answers)
33	Online conferences/debates between MPs and citizens (With reply)
34	Online advisory committees
35	Online citizens/discussion fora
36	Option to submit online evidence to an inquiry
37	Possibility to comment bills drafts
38	Possibility to do suggestions of issues for debate or bills suggestions
39	E-petitions system
40	Possibility to vote online on a specific public issue to be adopted

3.2.2 Websites' Content Analysis

Each parliamentary website (PW) was evaluated on two levels: a) the content, features, activities and tools provided by the PWs to promote public engagement (content); b) the effectiveness and quality of PWs (delivery)[45]. The first level captures the content of the website, while the second level captures the website' delivery quality. In doing so, the analysis draws a clear distinction between a website's content and its form and how effectively a website delivers its contents (Gibson, 2000).

For the first level (websites' content) a coding scheme that features the 40 variables defined according to the theoretical background and the meta-analysis previously presented in this chapter was used. The coding distinguishes different levels of engagement, from more formalistic to more substantive, identifying distinctive types and levels of public engagement activities. For the second level of analysis (websites' delivery), and in order to capture the PWs' effectiveness in delivering the online public engagement activities, tools and features, the coding scheme presents three main dimensions: *usability or ease of navigability, accessibility, and responsiveness* (Gibson and Ward, 2000) that will be thoroughly presented shortly.

The measurement of the 21 selected PWs took place between July and December 2017. Due to the dynamic nature of the Web, any website or social media profile can only offer a snapshot – a picture of the content present at a very specific moment of time. Still, the analysis does not include a diachronic aspect but rather a synchronic element, given the large scope of study, which contributes to the originality of this research and allows for the analysis of a series of research questions in ways that have been not been possible to look at in the past.

Table 3.6 presents the PWs of each lower chamber and parliaments being analysed.

[45] The websites were analysed in their native languages using the built-in translation tool in Google Chrome, which offers instant Web page translations.

Table 3.6 Parliamentary websites in analysis

Country	Parliament/Chamber	Parliament/Chamber name	Domain/Website
Austria	Lower House	National Council/Parliament	https://www.parlament.gv.at/
Belgium	Lower House	Chamber of Representatives	http://www.dekamer.be/
Bulgaria	Parliament	National Assembly	http://parliament.bg/
Croatia	Parliament	Sabor	http://www.sabor.hr/
Denmark	Parliament	Folketing	http://www.ft.dk/
Estonia	Parliament	Riigikogu	https://www.riigikogu.ee/
Finland	Parliament	Eduskunta	https://www.eduskunta.fi/
France	Lower House	National Assembly	http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/
Germany	Lower House	Bundestag	https://www.bundestag.de/en/
Greece	Parliament	Hellenic Parliament	http://www.hellenicparliament.gr/
Hungary	Parliament	National Assembly	http://www.parlament.hu
Ireland	Lower House	Dáil Éireann	http://www.oireachtas.ie/parliament/
Italy	Lower House	Chamber of Deputies	http://en.camera.it/
Netherlands	Lower House	Weede Kamer	https://www.tweedekamer.nl/
Portugal	Parliament	Assembleia da República	http://www.parlamento.pt/
Romania	Lower House	Chamber of Deputies	http://www.cdep.ro/
Slovakia	Parliament	National Council	http://www.nrsr.sk/
Slovenia	Lower House	National Assembly	http://www.dz-rs.si/
Spain	Lower House	Congress of Deputies	http://www.congreso.es
Sweden	Parliament	Riksdag	http://www.riksdagen.se/
UK	Lower House	House of Commons	http://www.parliament.uk/

3.2.2.1 Features of content analysis

When undertaking a content analysis, the researcher has a choice to decide a set of important procedures, such as the a) *depth of the analysis* (manifest content versus latent content); b) *the sampling and recording units*; and c) the *direction of the analysis* (deductive or inductive).

Concerning the *depth of the analysis*, it is important to consider manifest content, namely the visible content, the one which is on the surface of a text. Latent content concerns underlying meanings, which are anchored in the deep structure of a text. In this study, the focus is only on the manifest content on PWs, i.e. the visible content. For Berelson (1952) and Holsti (1969) only the analysis of manifest content is acceptable. This is clearly shown by Berenson's definition of content analysis (Berelson, 1952: 18). However, in contrast to earlier views, the majority of present-day professionals hold a flexible position – to proceed as needed: either stay on manifest level or also include latent content in the analysis (e.g., Neuendorf, 2002).

Sampling and recording units are also important element in content analysis. Specifically, in media studies, where it is crucial to define a sample since it is almost always impossible to code manually the entire population in study (such as in newspaper studies). The definition of the samples and the method for selecting them (stochastic-probability; purposive-intentional; and convenient sampling) constitutes one of the main aspects of content analysis. In this case, the sample and recording units are the PWs and it was not necessary to apply a *sampling method*, because the analysis convers the entirety of the population of websites under study (N=21).

Another essential constitutive component of content analysis is the *direction of analysis*, which is the route of the analysis: from data to findings or the other way around. Hence, the categories researchers use in a content analysis can be determined inductively, deductively, or by some combination of both. Abrahamson (1983) indicates that an inductive approach begins with the researchers 'immersing' themselves in the documents in order to identify the dimensions or *themes* that seem meaningful to the producers of each message. While in a deductive approach, researchers use a categorical scheme grounded theoretically by previous literature. Here, the categories were deductively determined by previous coding frames, as explained before, exclusively informed by the qualitative meta-analysis performed.

3.2.2.2 Coding schemes and procedure steps

Two coding schemes were developed to capture and code both websites *content* and its *delivery* qualities. In both coding schemes each variable is composed of three components: a) a *quantitative score,* selected in accordance with strict scoring conditions that ensure the cross-country comparability of the information presented; b) an *explanatory comment*; c) and a list of *sources* that provides the evidence upon which the score and comment are based.

Besides the PWs coding, screen shots of the website were saved, using the content capture approach by copying and saving all of the page's content, such as images and scripts. Additionally, qualitative notes were taken during the coding procedure, which provided additional contextual and rich information.

The *content coding scheme* primarily follows a dichotomous coding scheme in order to reduce interpretive error, such as Norris (2001a), 0= absence and 1=presence. However, to truly capture and measure the complexity of certain issues, some of the variables have an ordinal-level scale. These two types of measurement scales allowed to capture simultaneously the complexity and sophistication of concerns that a simple dichotomous coding scheme could not fully capture, but, at the same time, resorting to a dichotomous scale for the vast majority of variables reduced the interpretative error and increased reliability.

The ordinal scale was used for two variables: *'links to Social media'* and *'e-petitions system'*. In the first case, during the data collection, it became clear that there are different realities worth taking into account when answering the question 'Are there any links to Social Media?' For instance, some parliaments have only one social media account, but it is a thematic account, such as the Portuguese case, which only has a Facebook account for cultural events occurring in the Parliament. Yet, other Parliaments do not have any social media account, whereas some have several accounts in different platforms. Hence, a score *0* was attributed when there was no social media links; *0,25* was attributed when there was only one social media link to a thematic account (i.e. 'cultural page'); *0,5* was given to cases where there was one social media link to a full parliamentary account; *0,75* was given when there was one of each (i.e. one full parliamentary account + one thematic account); and finally the maximum value (*1)* was given when the parliament had more than one full parliamentary account. *Thematic accounts* mean, for instance, a Facebook page (or Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube, Instagram etc.) created to spread and publicize a specific and thematic issue, such as a page on education activities for young people or a page dedicated to the cultural events happening in

parliament. While a *full parliamentary account* is a complete account in the sense that it is not limited to a sole purpose or subject.

A second variable was coded using an ordinal-level scale instead of the dichotomous scale. Given the diversity of systems, elements and characteristics that defines an e-petition system, it would not be possible to measure them in a simple dichotomous manner. In this case, the measurement was defined according to the theoretical background and building on previous definitions of what constitutes an electronic petition system, particularly on the conceptualization provided by Bohle and Riehm (2013) which uses five dimensions to describe and evaluate E-petition systems (presented in Table 3.7).

Table 3.7 Bohle and Riehm (2013) e-petition framework

1.P*resence on the Web:*	Existence of a website for the parliamentary petition system OR Efforts of the petition body to inform about the petition system and further PR efforts
2.Submission of petitions:	Submission of petitions by e–mail OR Submission of petitions via an online form
3.Publication:	Publication of petitions on the Web; OR Publication of the decisions related to a given petition
4.Interaction of petitioner and petition body:	Possibility for petitioners to request information about the state of Processing of the petition via electronic channels; OR Possibility for the petitioner to add information during the petition process;
5.Involvement of the public:	Signing petitions online; OR Discussion of petitions in the framework of the electronic petition system (e.g., discussion forum).

Hence, based on these 5 dimensions of analysis, the PWs were coded using an ordinal-level scale between 0 to 1. The minimum score (0) was given when the PW did not fulfil any of the dimensions, and the remaining scores were given depending on the number of dimensions fulfilled (one dimension equals 0,20; two dimensions equals 0,40; three dimensions equals 0,60; four dimension equals 0,80; and five dimensions equals 1). Therefore, a more advanced e-petition system is distinguished from a less advanced e-petition system.

Also, there are cases where there isn't a parliamentary petition system. In particular in the Scandinavian and Baltic countries, where traditionally there are ombudsman institutions instead of parliamentary petition bodies. In these cases, since there isn't a petition system, it is not appropriate to assess the provision of an *electronic petition system*. These were coded as

'not applicable'. Riehm, Bohle and Lindner (2013) provided a good comparison of parliamentary petition bodies and ombudsman institutions. Summing up, the latter emphasizes the protection of individual rights and the handling of complaints concerning administrative actions. Overall, the complaints to ombudsman institutions concern public affairs less frequently than is the case with petitions to parliament. Hence, since the variable in this study captures and measures specifically the electronic petition systems, all of these cases were coded thinking about the parliamentary petition system and not the ombusdam institutions.

Regarding the *delivery coding scheme,* it can be broken down into three basic dimensions of analysis: *usability or ease of navigability, accessibility, and responsiveness* (Gibson and Ward, 2000), which in total are operationalized trough 6 individual variables. Table 3.8 summarizes the variables included in the coding scheme.

Table 3.8 Indicators for Website Delivery

Feature	**Measure**
Usability	Total number of mouse clicks to reach the features and content of public engagement from the homepage
Accessibility	Foreign language translation (+1) Blind/visually impaired software (+1) Easy language tool (+1)
Responsiveness (speed)	same day (5), 1 to 2 days (4), up to 1 week (3), up to 2 weeks (2), up to 1 month (1), more than 1 month (0)
Responsiveness (quality)	(0) if irrelevant to query; (1) If relevant to query

First, usability captures the ease of navigability, i.e. if users of the website can or cannot find what they need (Kortum and Acemyan, 2016). Research conducted from the navigability perspective suggests that Web users are more satisfied with and are more likely to return to websites that provide easy navigation and understandable organization (Nielsen, 1999; Nielsen and Loranger, 2006). The same is applied for political websites, which usually face a dilemma between using functions, such as hyperlinks, that take full advantage of the capabilities of the Internet in order to maximize interactivity or interest, and providing just basic information without employing more sophisticated Web tools in order to increase navigability. Research on political websites' usability has shown that simplicity in design and in political information presentation, as well as straightforward, organized, and easily navigable formats, are preferred among users of political websites (Tisinger et al., 2005).

Therefore, for each of the 40 variables measuring the content of the websites, data on the number of mouse clicks necessary to reach that content from the website homepage was also collected. There are other possible measurement options; however, previous research has proven that mouse clicks represent a reasonable proxy for usability, because the more links a user has to select in order to find the information/feature/tool they are seeking, the more likely it is that they are having difficulty finding that information or that they will get lost in the search. Based on the amount of research that has been published, usability professionals have identified mouse clicks as a reliable and valid metric for the overall assessment of usability (Kortum and Acemyan, 2016). Nevertheless, there might be multiple paths to reach the same information or feature from the homepage of a website. This is a limitation of this measure, however. The optimal scenario to assess the websites' usability would be through a selected set of random people in each country testing the respective PWs. In the impossibility to perform such an endeavour, a 'do-it-yourself walkthrough' testing was undergone, recording the total number of mouse clicks necessary to reach information and features on the website.

Second, although a website may be user-friendly, this will be, to some extent, undermined if the website is not accessible to a wide audience. For instance, despite the consolidation of Web accessibility standards and the enactment of strong disability discrimination legislation in many European countries, much of the Web remains inaccessible to disabled people (Adam and Kreps, 2009). Consequently, the 'digital divide' between those who can access websites and those who cannot, threatens to open up and grow in our societies. Therefore, there are proactive features a website can include that indicate an organization's commitment to accessibility, such as foreign language translations or software for the visually impaired (Gibson and Ward, 2000). Following this argument, each PW was examined to evaluate its accessibility; if it includes options of sign language or/and audio version, as well easy language tools, and also, if and how many non-native languages are offered.

The final element that measures the PWs delivery is the capacity with which the website responds to a relatively simple and specific request for information (Gibson and Ward, 2000). This can be called 'responsiveness' and can be broken down into two components: the speed of response and the quality of the response, in terms of if the reply was relevant or irrelevant for the query. Therefore, each PW was 'tested', i.e. an email was send to the webmasters (whenever the contact was available) or to another contact purposely designed to answer citizens queries, requesting specific information concerning the website. The answers received were coded taking into account its relevance to the query. All parliaments were contacted on

the same day, September 14th of 2018 with a specific set of questions - all referring about information or documents on the website.

Finally, to ensure a good reliability, the coding schemes included clear definitions, easy-to-follow instructions. Furthermore, reliability checks were undergone to assure coder consistency, which will be presented in the next section.

3.2.2.3 Inter-rater reliability checks

Inter-rater reliability (or more specifically 'inter-rater agreement') is 'near the heart of content analysis; if the coding is not reliable, the analysis cannot be trusted' (Singletary, 1993: 294). Thus, several steps were taken to test the coding reliability in this research. It should be noted that reliability in content analysis refers to coder consistency and not to data consistency (Popping, 2000).

To ensure inter-rater reliability (IRR) in measurement, an instructed research assistant coded twenty randomly selected indicators of websites' content for all 21 websites included in the analysis, which constitute 50% of the corpus. A fully crossed design was used, which means that the variables that were rated by multiple coders were rated by the same set of coders (Hallgren, 2012).

Hence, the results were compared with the author's coding, and simple agreement rates and Krippendorf's alphas (Krippendorff 1980; 2004) were calculated for variable tests. An agreement rate of 95.2% was found for the overall sample, and they were above 85% for each country sample, with some variance among countries as would be expected[46].

Percentage agreement is useful, but because it does not correct for agreements that would be expected by chance, and therefore overestimates the level of agreement, it should not be used as the only or even the major measure of interrater consistency (Cohen, 1960; Hallgren, 2012; K. Krippendorff, 1980). Nonetheless, percent agreement registers only agreements and disagreements—there is no 'credit' for coders whose decisions are 'close.' Thus, it only makes sense to use percent agreement with nominal level variables, which is the majority of the variables tested in the coding scheme. Therefore, Krippendorff's alphas[47], which take chance agreement into account, were also calculated. The Krippendorff's nominal α is 0.9252 for the

[46] See Table A.4 in Appendix A for more details.

[47] There are other methods and indices, such as the Holsti's Method, Scott's Pi (π), Cohen's Kappa (κ). For a review see Lombard et al. 2002.

400 units, which is a high degree of reliability for the overall sample[48]. Regarding the breakdown by countries, a similar and positive pattern was found. The α was lower in only two cases – Italy and Slovakia, with 0.7969 and 0.7777 respectively – which is a modest, but still acceptable, degree of reliability (Heyes and Krippendorff, 2007).

Since there are different levels of variables, the average kappa index for nominal-level and for ordinal-level variables separately for the overall sample and for each country sample were computed. As can be seen, Krippendorff's nominal α is 0. 9252 and Krippendorff's ordinal α is 0,9623 for the 407 units, a high degree of reliability (in the overall sample). Regarding the breakdown by countries, the results show a similar and positive pattern (see Appendix A for more details on each country). In some countries the Krippendorff's nominal and ordinal α are equal to 1, which means the two coders did not disagree; some countries present a high degree of reliability (when the α is above 0,8) and for two cases – Italy and Slovakia - the Krippendorff's nominal α is 0,7969 and 0,7777, a modest but acceptable degree of reliability (Heyes and Krippendorff, 2007)[49].

Advocates of quantitative content analysis (Berelson, Holsti, Krippendorff, and Neuendorf) claim that good reliability (0.80 or higher) is the basic precondition of a good content analysis. It is widely acknowledged that intercoder reliability is an essential and critical component of content analysis and (although it does not ensure validity), when it is not established, the data and interpretations of the data can not be considered valid.

3.2.2.4 Challenges, limitations and advantages

The content analysis undergone entails several challenges along with a few limitations that must be acknowledged, either by the research technique itself, through the content of analysis (the Web), or due to the scope of the study.

[48] See Table A.4 in Appendix A for more details.

[49] There are different guidelines for interpreting kappa values along with different qualitative cut-offs. Krippendorff (1980) provides a more conservative interpretation suggesting that conclusions should be discounted for variables with values less than 0.67, conclusions tentatively be made for values between 0.67 and 0.80, and definite conclusions be made for values above 0.80. Even though these cut-offs are conservative, Krippendorff's recognizes that acceptable inter-rater reliability estimates will vary depending on the study methods and the research quest (Hallgren, 2012).

One of the major issues concerns the continuous change of the websites' content, which leads to potential problems with data collection (McMillan, 2000) and limits the study to a picture of content at a given moment of time (Morris, 2009). Due to the dynamic nature of the Web, any website or social media profile content cannot offer but a snapshot, a picture of the content present at an overview of a very specific moment of time: the websites analysed in one day are more than likely to have changed in a few months' time, and the social media profiles are even more likely to have changed in a few days: 'Each static analysis can only provide for a snapshot in a dynamic process of change' (Zittel, 2003: 49). The Web is thus, at the same time, ephemeral and permanent (Schneider and Foot, 2004). Its ephemerality derives from its dynamism, which means that websites are created, changed, or eliminated at a very fast race. On the other hand, websites do stay online for a given period of time- sometimes shorter, sometimes longer - which differentiates them from other purely transient media products such as radio or television emissions.

Therefore, the results from the quantitative Web content analysis of PWs will only apply to the very particular time when the sources were analysed. This is a common problem to any research on the Internet[50], quantitative or qualitative (Vicente-Merino, 2007). However, this does not mean that the validity of the results should be questioned. Even if only a 'snapshot', the results of the websites' content do offer a picture of how parliaments are using the Internet to engage citizens at a certain moment of time. Nevertheless, a lot of the features being measured are difficult to implement, and therefore unlikely to change rapidly. The snapshot is likely to be meaningful, especially when considered synchronically. Moreover, the results are also of high value to be used as a benchmark for comparison, both in future research in the same area and in studies about the use of the Web by other political actors or in other geographical areas. Furthermore, combining qualitative techniques in the research design allows us to overcome the problems inherent to each of these techniques of research. Another challenge closely related to the dynamic nature of the Web is the complexity and variety of features present in the Web, such as mixed multiple media (text, graphics, animation, video and audio), interactivity, decentralised and hyperlinked structures, and its continuously evolving nature (Kim and Kuljis, 2010).

The large scope of the study contributes to the originality of this research and allows for the analysis of a series of research questions in ways that have been impossible to look at

[50] It is also true for cross-section opinion surveys.

in the past. But to be sure, a number of problems have arisen due to the high number of units of comparison. For instance, on a practical level, the difficulties in terms of the languages in which these websites are written should not be dismissed. Most websites are presented in more than one language. Although English is one of the most commonly used languages on these websites, in non-English speaking countries, the English-language section is usually reduced and incomplete. An analysis based solely on the English versions of parliaments' websites would result in a biased dataset. To overcome this problem, the websites were analysed in their native languages using the built-in translation tool in Google Chrome, which offers instant Web page translations. However the instant translation webpage provided by Google Chrome is not perfect, but since the content analysis captures more formal content, and is not highly sensitive to interpretation or context, it proved suitable for the purpose of this research, even though the translated version was not always exact. Furthermore, this study follows a dichotomous coding scheme (0= absence; 1=presence) such as Norris (2001a) which reduces possible interpretive errors.

Nevertheless, this thesis provides a *multidimensional measure of e-engagement supply* built upon a meta-analysis of previous coding frames. This measure provides different angles of analysis and easily travels across different political systems and countries. Furthermore, its originality is based on its versatility, as it allows us to obtain an overview of parliaments' supply of online public engagement, and, at the same time, it disentangles the different ways parliaments promote engagement, such as informing, communicating and promoting participation – different ladders of public engagement.

PART TWO

COMPARATIVE PARLIAMENTARY WEBSITE ANALYSIS: QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE ASPECTS

CHAPTER IV

ESTABLISHING THE PHENOMENA: THE SUPPLY OF ONLINE PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT IN EUROPE

'[…]before one proceeds to explain or to interpret a phenomenon, it is advisable to establish that the phenomenon actually exists, that it is enough of a regularity to require and to allow explanation'

Robert Merton (1987: 2),

This chapter begins with a quotation from Robert Merton one of the premier American sociologists of the past century and Columbia professor, who has highlighted the importance of the scientific practice of 'establishing the phenomenon'. These Mertonian observations are useful for an examination of how parliaments are adapting to ICT and Internet to promote public engagement and thus establishing the phenomenon before a causal inference analysis takes place. Hence, this chapter systematically describes parliament's practices and strategies of online public engagement in Europe and, in the next chapter the explanations for the results found here will be then tested.

The indicators used here, to measure the content/features and delivery of parliamentary websites (PWs), are the same as in Chapter III (see Table 3.5). Since details on the selection of these indicators and the coding process of the websites were given in Chapter III, they will not be repeated here. Instead, describing the dependent variables of interest among the 21 cases is the focus. This chapter provides a systematic answer for the first question of interest in this regard: *what tools and features are available on the websites of national parliaments to promote online public engagement?*

The chapter is organized in five sections. Section 4.1 presents the descriptive results for each indicator of online public engagement, which reveals the structure and features of PWs, and parliaments' strategies and choices for promoting public engagement. Section 4.2 outlines how those indicators were aggregated into composite measures of online public engagement. Section 4.3 displays the descriptive results for the aggregate variables among countries. The results reveal trends and patterns of e-engagement across countries. Section 4.4 presents a brief

account of how parliaments are integrating social media in PWs. This section provides a specific analysis into the activity as well popularity of parliamentary Facebook and Twitter pages, since they are the most used among the parliaments in the study. Section 4.5, presents the websites' delivery, which assess the effectiveness in delivering public engagement activities, tools and features by looking into three basic components: usability or ease of navigability, accessibility, and responsiveness (Gibson and Ward, 2000). Finally, and at the end of the Chapter, section 4.6 presents a summary of the main findings, which will enable us to map each of the 21 democracies in what concerns their online public engagement.

4.1 STRUCTURE AND FEATURES OF PARLIAMENTARY WEBSITES

As Chapter III explained before, and as a result of the qualitative meta-analysis undergone, public engagement includes three main components: *information*, which entails the one- way distribution of contents; *communication and interactivity*, which involves opportunities to establish dialogue as well as the promotion of interaction features; and *consultation and participation*, which encompasses features and tools to consult citizens views as well the promotion of participation in the policy making decision.

All these strategies of public engagement allow political actors, institutions and voters to communicate with one another and are thus important for the functioning of political organizations, citizenship, and democracy (Vaccari, 2013). Based on these three main components of parliamentary public engagement, an assessment of how parliaments structure their websites among 21 countries in Europe is provided.

Information supply

The presence of information functions on parliament's websites was evaluated through twenty indicators. Table 4.1 shows the distribution of the indicators across the 21 websites analysed for this research. The data shows a three-tiered distribution of information characteristics. Four of them (Information regarding how to visit the parliament, list of members; list of committees; committees membership) were found in all parliaments websites analysed.

The second tier of informational functions includes twelve features that can be found in three-thirds of parliaments websites (description of parliamentary bodies and functions;

schedule of current and planned parliamentary activities and events; search facility for legislation; biographies of all MPs; guide on the role of committees; guide on the legislative process; guide on the role of members; schedule of Parliament debates; list of written questions, full-text search tool; information on educational activities and/or games; option to download the debates or to request it). These two sets of functions thus constitutes a baseline for content provision on political Websites. Indeed, the majority of parliaments seems to recognize the importance of a multi-directional flow of information as right and necessity for a parliamentary democracy to function in a reliable manner (Coleman et al., 1999; Mulder, 1999). Furthermore, almost all parliaments (81%) are now investing in developing an engagement strategy targeting children and young people. Recent research from Hansard Society, based in Australia, UK, Chile and Canada, shows that both parliamentarians, parliamentary officials and members of the public agree and feel that education plays a key role in helping to bridge the gap between elected representatives and the public (Williamson and Fallon, 2011). Indeed, the engagement strategy of Northern Ireland Assembly have identified an educational program as a key investment priority to promote engagement, targeting children and young people. The program promotes schools' visits to the Assembly and established an advisory 'Youth Forum' designed to meet on a quarterly basis in the Assembly to 'consider, debate and make recommendations on issues of particular importance to young people' (Clark and Wilford, 2012: 387).

The third tier includes four functions that were present in less than three-thirds of parliaments websites (MPs recording votes, text search tool for debates, virtual tour/panorama of the parliament and information on cultural events). These functions either require a certain investment in terms of technology and at the same time the provision of more detailed information and access to documents (MPs recording votes; text search tool) or refer to parliamentary communication practices that are specific to particular countries. Some countries do not organize cultural events in the parliament, while others organize conferences, galleries, seminars and exhibitions.

Table 4.1 Distribution of Information Indicators (N=21)

Indicator	*Percentage*
Information regarding how to visit the parliament	100.0%
A list of members	100.0%
List of committees	100.0%
Committees membership	100.0%
Description of parliamentary bodies and functions	95.2%
Schedule of current and planned parliamentary activities and events	95.2%
Search facility for pending or ongoing legislation	95.2%
Bibliographies of all MPs	95.2%
Guide (e.g. factsheet or summary) on the role of committees	95.2%
Schedule of Parliament debates	95.2%
List of written questions	95.2%
Full-text search tool	85.7%
Guide (e.g. factsheet or summary) of the legislative process	85.7%
Guide (e.g. factsheet or summary) on the role of members	81.0%
Information on educational activities/target to schools or young people and/or games	81.0%
Option to download the debates or to request it	76.2%
MPs recording votes	61.9%
Text search tool for debates	61.9%
Virtual tour/panorama of the parliament	57.1%
Information on cultural events	47.6%

Communication and Interactive multimedia

Communication and interactive multimedia features were measured through a total of eleven indicators, all dichotomous except one ordinal-level indicator (Table 4.2). As done for information, it is possible to group the indicators that constitute online communication and interaction into three tiers.

The top tier includes six indicators (email address to contact the MPs; audio or video archive of plenary meeting; broadcast/webcast of plenary meeting; audio or video archive of committees; broadcast/webcast of committees; links to social media) that can be found in more than two-thirds of the PWs analysed. These indicators constitute the core interactive communication functions that might create more symmetry in communication between leaders and citizens and shifts the balance of power between citizens and parliaments (Hacker, 1996). First, it is worth to note that all websites provide an email address to contact the MPs, without exceptions. This finding is confirmed also by other empirical studies, which point out that

political and parliamentary communication is facilitated and becomes more important through the use of emails (Dai and Norton, 2007; Triga and Molioni, 2014). Second, since the Web has shifted from text and pictures to multimedia as the broadband Internet is becoming cheaper 'webcasting is one of the exciting and relatively newer features of the Internet' (Sobaci, 2012: 38). The basic idea of transmission via the Internet is to give the public free and full access to debates and other activities in parliament. Webcasting can be a particularly effective mechanism for reaching the public when the population is broadly dispersed over a large geographic area and there is widespread penetration of the Internet (Sobaci, 2012). Webcasting interest has been growing for plenary sessions and committee meetings in the parliaments (Griffith and Casini, 2010), especially for the plenary sessions as Table 4.2 shows. Still in this tier, the majority of parliaments are on social media. There is no doubt that more and more parliaments are attempting to use social networks, but not all of these efforts are the same: not all of the parliaments are on social media in the same way. Most parliaments are: 1) fully invested on social media (i.e. they have full accounts on social media); and 2) are using a multi-platform strategy, which means they use different platforms (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube) to target different groups of people. It is also possible to identify a few parliaments that are timidly approaching social media. These are the cases of parliaments that have created thematic pages, which can be about any specific topic or target any specific group (i.e. culture on the parliament or about young people and the parliament). More information on how parliaments are blending social media with PWs will be provided further in this chapter (section 4.5).

The second tier includes three indicators (email address to contact the commissions, alerting service or a weekly or monthly newsletter/bulletin, parliament mobile application) that were found in between two-thirds and one-third of parliament's websites. The investment in a mobile application goes beyond the provision of a simple website adapted to tablet and smartphone formats (mobile website). A mobile app is a program that is downloaded and installed onto a user's mobile device. Therefore, ideal for frequent and repeated use, which reveals some parliaments are going beyond the opportunities brought by the Web 1.0 and are capitalizing on recent advances in ICT by investing in new tools to answer a specific need, whilst increasing users loyalty.

Finally, the last tier includes only one indicator (blogs from parliamentary bodies) that was found in the Swedish parliament[51]. However, it is important to note that the Swedish blog,

[51] The British House of Lords has also a collaborative blog to facilitate direct dialogue with the public. Funded by the House of Lords but managed by the Hansard Society, the 'Lords of the Blog' website is a forum for Members

managed by the Riksdag Administration, was specifically designed to inform users about new content and functions of the website. Citizens are allowed to ask questions and submit comments about other aspects of the Riksdag's digital development. The blog aim is to provide transparency and to allow citizens and users to make comments and suggestions regarding the digital and technological development of the Swedish parliament.

Table 4.2 Distribution of Communication and Interaction indicators (N=21)

Indicator	Percentage
Email address to contact the MPs	100.0%
Audio or video archive of plenary meeting	95.2%
Audio or video broadcast and/or webcast (streaming) of plenary meetings	95.2%
Audio or video archive of Committees meetings	85.7%
Audio or video broadcast and/or webcast (streaming) of Committees meetings	81.0%
Links to Social media	
None=0	0%
One social media link of a thematic account =1	19.0%
One social media link of a parliamentary account =2	0%
More than one social media link (i.e. one parliament account + one thematic account) =3	0%
More than one social media link (>= 1 parliamentary accounts) =4	81.0%
Links to MPs external and personal websites	71.4%
Email address to contact the commissions	66.7%
Alerting service or a weekly or monthly newsletter/bulletin	61.9%
Parliament mobile application	38.1%
Blogs from parliamentary bodies	4.8%

Note: The 'links to social media' indicator was latter recoded into two categories in order to be part of the index of communication and Interactive multimedia (0= No; 1= Yes). See details on Appendix B.

of the House of Lords to talk about their life and work with a broad online audience. Launched in 2008 the blog with nine regular contributors, the blog has now moved to over forty regular contributors who write about their areas of expertise, helping to demystify the House of Lords with personal insight and candour (Hansard Society, 2011a). Since the blog is funded and was built for the House of Lords (the upper house), it was not included in the analysis, given the study focus only on the lower chambers.

Consultation and Participation

Consultation and participation features were measured through a total of nine indicators, all dichotomous, except for one ordinal-level indicator. As expected, there is much more dispersion among parliaments on the distribution of consultation and participation indicators. As done before, the indicators that constitute online consultation and participation were group into three tiers. The top tier includes only one indicator, e-petition system, which was found in almost two-thirds of parliament's websites. This is by far the most used consultation and participation tool of all the features. This tool uses the Internet to enable citizens to initiate a petition on a public issue, invite others to signal their support and/or finally submit their petition. Electronic petitions can be somewhat more varied than their paper counterparts. Thus, an ordinal-level indicator was used to measure and fully captured the variety and types of e-petitions. In its most basic form, an electronic petition system could only be present on the Web. In its more advanced forms, electronic petition systems might admit the submission of petitions online, or the publication of petitions on the Web, or allow some type of interaction between the petitioner and the petition body. Finally, in the most advanced form it can allow the involvement of the public by providing the possibility of petitions signing the petitions online or discussing the petitions on the Web.

The second tier includes the majority of the remaining indicators (possibility to comment bills drafts; option to submit online evidence to an inquiry; online citizens/discussion for a; online collective appeals/citizens initiatives; voting online on a specific public issue to be adopted, online surveys or opinion polls with closed answers; online conferences/debates between MPs and citizens with reply) which were found in less than one-third of parliament's websites. In specific, these tools of consultation and participation where found in between 4,8% and 19% of the cases. Finally, the third tier includes only one indicator (online advisory committees) which was not found in any website.

Table 4.3 Distribution of Consultation and Participation indicators (N=21)

Indicator	*Percentage*
E-petitions system	
No=0	28.6%
Yes (including different formats)=1	52.4%
Possibility to do suggestions of issues for debate or bills suggestions	23.8%
Possibility to comment bills drafts	14.3%
Option to submit online evidence to an inquiry	14.3%
Online citizens/discussion fora	9.5%
Possibility to vote online on a specific public issue to be adopted	4.8%
Online surveys or opinion polls (closed answers)	4.8%
Online conferences/debates between MPs and citizens (with reply)	4.8%
Online advisory committees	0.0%

Note: 1. The 'E-petition system' indicator was originally in an ordinal scale, but was latter recoded in to two categories in order to be part of the index of Consultation and Participation (0= No; 1= Yes). See details on Appendix B.

4.2 PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: E-ENGAGEMENT SUPPLY AND ITS COMPONENTS

The individual indicators are not just interesting by themselves. Combining their values into composite indicators (after the definition of three major dimensions of public engagement, which methodological procedure was explained above in Chapter III) allows us to better understand the overall morphology and performance of parliament's websites.

Composite Indicators (CIs) comparing country performance are increasingly recognised as useful tools in policy analysis, public communication and in benchmarking or monitoring performance. Such CIs provide simple comparisons of countries that can be used to illustrate complex and sometimes elusive issues in wide-ranging fields. Besides it is easier to interpret CIs than to identify common trends across many separate indicators (OECD/EC JRC, 2008). A composite indicator is formed when individual indicators or measures, that are highly related to one another conceptually or statistically, are compiled into a single index (Ley, 1972). The composite indicator should ideally measure multi- dimensional concepts which cannot be captured by a single indicator (OECD/EC JRC, 2008).

There are many ways to create CIs, including averaging and meaningful grouping. For the purpose of this analysis, a simple averaging approach was used to create CIs able to capture the multidimensionality inherent of the public engagement concept. The meta-analysis previously undergone assures that the indicators being grouped are conceptually and meaningfully related.

The procedure was the following: each of three dimensions found in the meta-analysis is composed of various features and content that at the end are added up and provide the total score for every dimension. The z scores of the original indicators were added and divided by the total number of indicators, which also represents the total number of possible scores, since the maximum score per indicator is always one. Subsequently, the three dimensions are collapsed into a single indicator by simply adding the three scores of these dimensions which is named 'e-engagement index'. To enhance interpretation, the *Z* scores were transformed into *T* scores with a range of 0–100; higher scores indicate greater provision of online public engagement.

Combining the three composite indicators into one raises issues of *weighting.* In order to ensure the different number of total indicators in each dimension (Information=20; Communication and Interactivity= 11; Consultation and Participation=9) does not bias the results, the sum of z scores of the original indicators were divided by the total number of indicators/scores. By doing this, the final composite indicator relies on equal weighting, i.e. all variables are given the same weight. This essentially implies that all variables are 'worth' the same in the composite indicator, given that there is insufficient knowledge of causal relationships and a lack of consensus on the alternative. In any case, equal weighting does not mean 'no weights', but implicitly implies that the weights are equal, i.e. each dimension contributes with 33,3% for the final composite indicator.

Combining different indicators also raises issues of *dimensionality* (whether the indicators that are compounded do pertain to the same domain). With respect to dimensionality, the methodology section has already offered a discussion of the empirical techniques and theoretical reasoning behind the choices made. Besides, internal consistency of composite indicators was checked. Kuder–Richardson Formula 20 (KR-20), a measure of internal consistency reliability for measures with dichotomous choices, was calculated to ensure internal consistency[52]. A *KR-20 alpha of* 0,551 for the *information index*[53]*; a KR-20 alpha of* 0,581 for the *communication and interaction index*[54]; a KR-20 alpha of 0,597 for the *consultation and participation index;* and finally a *KR-20 alpha* of 0,706 for the *e-egagement*

[52] The two ordinal-level variables were, at this stage, recoded to a dichotomous scale (0=No; 1=yes) to be able to group all the variables in the same scale. This transformation is explained in detailed on Appendix B.

[53] To achieve an acceptable reliability between the items in this composite indicator one of the original variables was removed. Namely 'Is there committees work documents/reports available?' variable.

[54] To achieve an acceptable reliability between the items in this composite indicator one of the original variables was removed. Namely, 'Is there an email address to contact the parliamentary groups?' variable.

index (with all indicators) which is probably higher because it has more items comparing to the other indices[55].Even though these alphas are slightly lower than the widely-accepted social science cut-of (0.70), the analysis can proceed given the selection of the individual indicators and their inclusion on the major dimensions is based on previous literature. The aggregation of variables in to major dimensions was previously validated by the qualitative meta-analysis undergone and the results achieved though this method (see Chapter III). Besides, the KR-20 alphas are not so distant from the ideally cut-off.

These indices of information; communication and interactive multimedia; consultation and participation and e-engagement should be treated as empirical approximations. They reduce a multifaceted, complex reality to convenient— and internally coherent, since reliability checks were done— summaries, whose central tendencies provide an overall indicator of parliament's online priorities and strategies. Most indicators measure the *potential for*, rather than the actual *provision of* public engagement. That is, by simply asking citizens to 'have their say' through email or online polls, PWs do not necessarily fulfil these promises unless politicians and staffers act upon the inputs that citizens might provide through these tools (Vaccari, 2013). Therefore, one might ask what is the adding value? Because, providing the tools and information for public engagement is the pre-condition for establishing effective engagement

As we can see in Table 4.4 political websites perform on average better than half of the maximum proficiency theoretically possible, as shown by the mean and median values of the indices. Excepting for consultation and participation index, which is much lower than half its maximum value. This finding suggests that parliaments websites have consolidated a set of functions that ensure the provision of information and communication and interactive multimedia, but this goal is prioritized over those of engaging citizens in a more profound stage by providing opportunities for consulting citizens and allow their participation in the policy decision making process. This finding corroborates most of the previous research on PWs, which has so far found that parliaments tend to privilege online information at the expense of more engaging processes.

[55] See Appendix B for the KR-20 results.

Table 4.4 Descriptive statistics of composite variables

	Scale	Min	Max	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation
Information	0-100	50,00	100	85,24	85,0	10,54
Communication and Interaction	0-100	27,27	81,82	64,50	63,63	15,19
Consultation and Participation	0-100	0,00	55,56	14,02	11,11	14.94
E-engagement Index	0-100	42,50	82,50	63,62	63,0	8,58

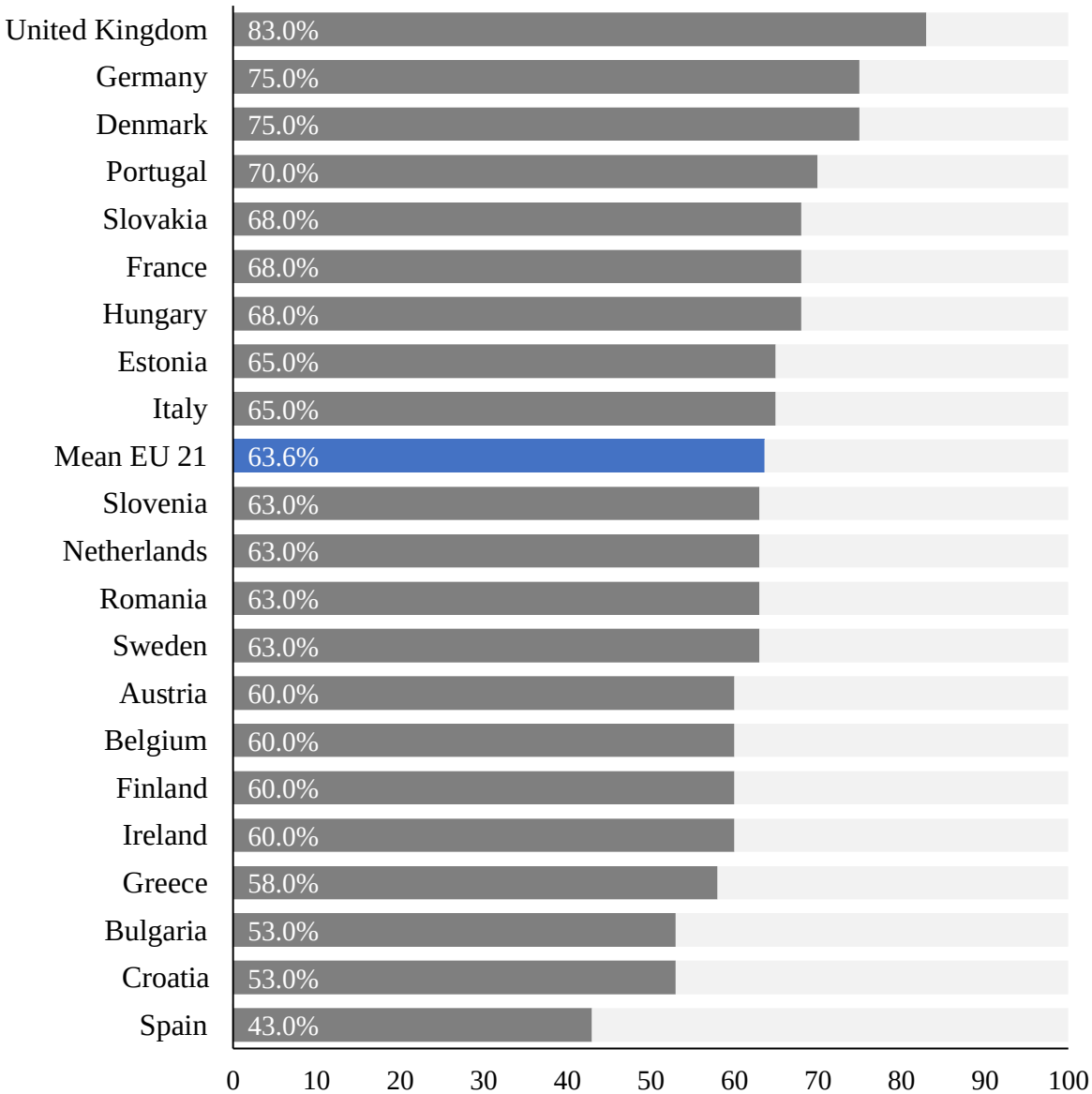
Note: The information index includes 20 indicators; the communication and interactive multimedia index include 11 indicators; the consultation and participation index include 9 indicators; the e-engagement index includes 40 indicators.

The fact that the mean and median values for all indices are so different indicates there is ample *variation across the twenty-one websites*. Furthermore, the fact that the standard deviation values are so high indicates there is *variation inside of each index.* For instance, as the standard deviations in Table 4.4 suggest, there is slightly more variance in the index of communication and interactive multimedia and in the index of consultation and participation than in the information index. This result could indeed be expected, given that it is precisely the engagement potential of digital media parliaments, along with other political actors (see Vaccari, 2013), have been more hesitant to develop. These variations among countries will be analysed in the next sections.

4.3 CROSS-COUNTRY COMPARISON OF E-ENGAGEMENT SUPPLY

Starting with the overall index, which aggregates the three components of engagement (information; communication and interactive multimedia and consultation and participation) into one measure, figure 4.1 shows important differences among some countries.

Figure 4.1 E-engagement Index in Europe (%)

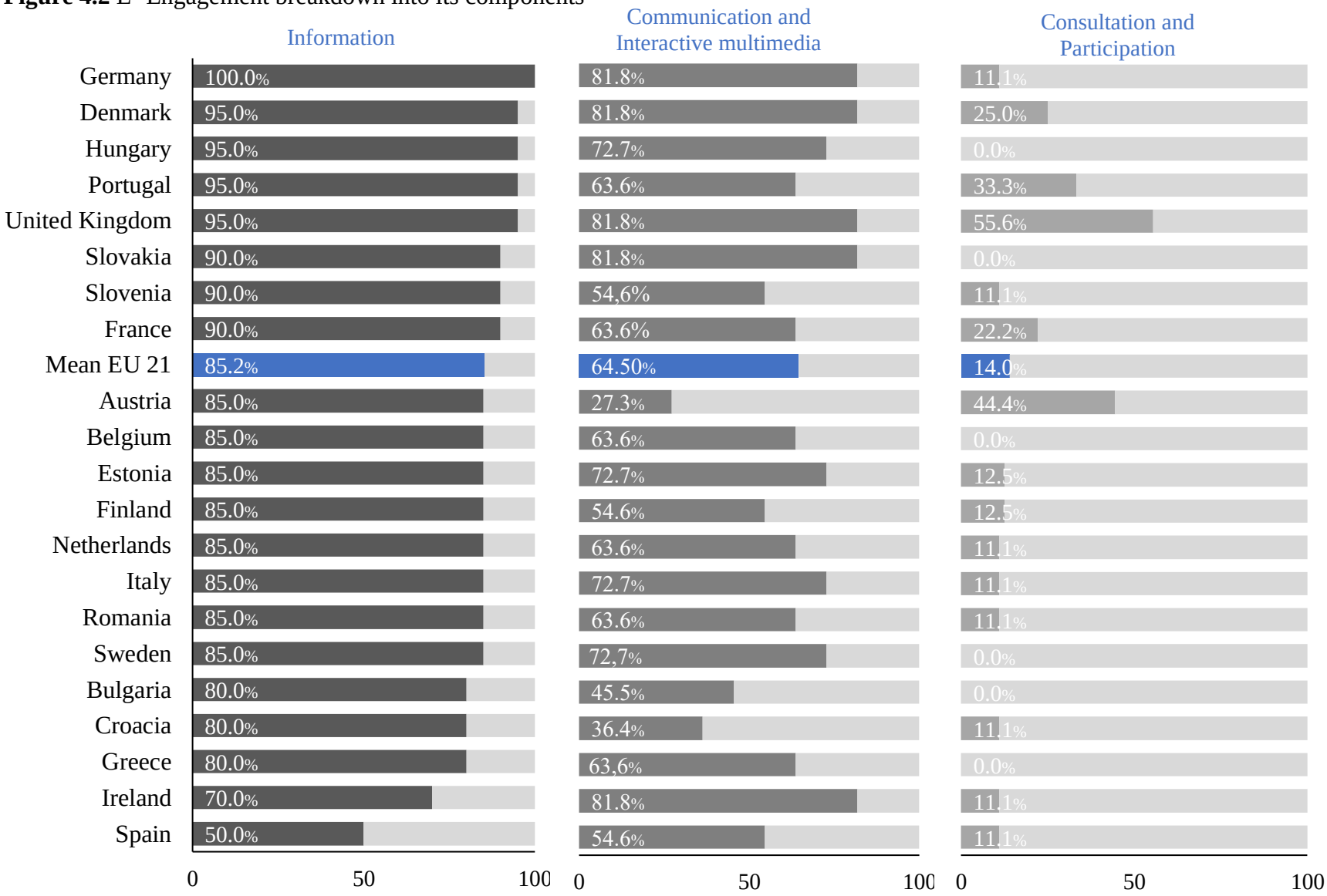


The United Kingdom emerges as the top-ranking country (83%), followed by Denmark and Germany. Recent comparative data has also placed the UK parliament at the top with the highest score of the 28 European member-states (Schwanholz et al., 2018). In the early 2000's Trechsel et al e-legislature index placed Germany in first place and Denmark and United Kingdom in fourth and fifth place. Even though some indicators are not exactly the same, it is possible to conclude with some caution that no major changes happened at the top of the ranking in the last 20 years. A second group of parliaments also stand out positively, such as Portugal, Slovakia, Hungary and France. At the other end of the scale, is Spain in the bottom of the ranking (43.0%), which is corroborated by Trechsel findings in the past. While, Spain in 2000 was not in the last place on the ranking, it was still at the bottom and data showed that the Spanish lower house had a relatively underdeveloped website (score below the overall average). Overall, twelve countries score below the mean (63.6%) while nine countries score above the average.

Even though it seems the ranking has not change drastically over the years, it does not mean there are no differences over the years. Compared to previous results, overall, there is a steady but expected progress regarding the information provision over the years. No major changes happened at the top and bottom of the ranking after almost 20 years, which might indicate that the differences among parliaments are not caused by conjunctural factors but instead by structural factors, which will be further discussed in the following chapters of the thesis. Nevertheless, these comparisons over time need to be interpreted with some caution. After all, the measures applied in this study are not exactly the same as the ones previously used – especially since this was not the goal of the analysis.

Since the e-engagement index provides a basic snapshot of parliaments' supply of public engagement features on the Web, figure 4.2 presents the average scores of the selected cases at the three different components of online public engagement in order to observe the variation between them. By breaking down the e-engagement index into each of its components, it becomes possible to gain further insights into the specific emphasis that is placed on each of the three dimensions by the respective parliaments as they develop their websites.

Figure 4.2 E- Engagement breakdown into its components



First, PWs perform on average better than half of the maximum proficiency theoretically possible, as shown by the mean values of the indices in figure 4.2. Excepting for consultation and participation index, which is much lower than half its maximum value. This finding suggests that parliaments' websites have consolidated a set of functions that ensure the provision of information and communication and interaction tools, but these goals are prioritized over those of engaging citizens in a more profound stage by providing opportunities for consulting citizens and allow their participation in the policy decision making process. This finding corroborates most of the previous research on parliament's websites, which has so far found that parliaments tend to privilege online information at the expense of more engaging processes (Sobaci, 2010; Triga and Milioni, 2014; Bernardes and Leston-Bandeira, 2016).

Additionally, the fact that the mean values for all indices are so different indicates there is ample *variation across the twenty-one websites*. Besides, the standard deviation values are high: information=10.5; communication and interaction=15.185; consultation and participation=14.9; which also indicates that exists *variation inside of each index*. For instance, there is slightly more variance in the second- and third-dimension than in the first dimensions capturing the supply of information. This result could indeed be expected, given that it is precisely the engagement potential of digital media political actors, such as parliaments, have been more hesitant to develop (see Vaccarri, 2013). These variations among countries will be analysed in the next sections.

In the figure 4.2 the provision of *information* appears as the most important website activity by most European legislatures, although with a substantial degree of variation. Its average score is 85.2, which is the highest average score of all three components. Previous literature on European parliament's websites from the early 2000's has reached similar conclusions. Even though some indicators are not exactly the same, it is possible to compare the findings of this theis to the E-legislature Index of Trechsel et al (2003) and its components (information, bilateral activity, multilateral activity and user-friendless) built for 25 member-states. Their work revealed that information and bilateral interactivity were the most important website activities, being the average score of their information index 68.1, which clearly shows that parliaments are performing better in providing information to their citizens.

Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Ireland, and Spain ranked below the average score in this component. Most of the countries that scored low on information provision also had poor scores on the remaining dimensions. However, this excludes Ireland, which performed better on communication and interactive multimedia tools. By contrast, Germany ranked first place

on information provision and on communication and interactive multimedia sharing the top positions with the following countries: Denmark, Slovakia, Ireland, and the UK.

The provision of *communication and interactive multimedia* tools are the second most important website activities for most European legislatures – the average score was 64.5. Nevertheless, many legislatures scored below average. Several parliaments are failing to provide mobile applications and blogs for parliamentary affairs. On the contrary, parliaments are intensively integrating social media and audio/video platforms into their websites; a result that needs to be further developed along this chapter. In this dimension, there is a higher degree of variation across countries: the difference between the legislature ranked in first place and the legislature raked in last place totals 54.5%. This means that Germany, Denmark, Slovakia, Ireland, and the UK performed three times better than Austria. However, Austria is not the only country performing poorly on providing *communication and interactive multimedia* tools and features, which is mainly due to the lack of audio or video broadcasts/webcasts of committees and plenary sessions; Croatia and Bulgaria also performed poorly in this component. Despite Austria's poor performance in these activities, it seems to have prioritised the provision of information as well consultation and participation tools.

As expected, the provision of *consultation and participation* dimension represents the least important website activities for most European legislatures. The average score was 14.0, and even countries that performed well in the previous dimensions seem to clearly disregard this last one. Unlike the two other dimensions, it is possible to find a large group of countries that do not invest in consultation and participation tools at all. The same findings were achieved by Trechsel et al (2003) for the multilateral interactivity index, which to some degree relates to the consultation and participation index. This reveals parliaments are still using ICTs in a conservative and cautiously way, prioritizing the supply of information and leaving other activities of public engagement as secondary.Despite the variance found, there is limited use of interactive features which allow citizens to comment and deliberate on policy issues as reported previously in literature (Norris, 2001a; Trechsel et al., 2003; Coleman, 2006; Triga & Milioni, 2014). This mostly reflects parliaments are following a mologic model by focusing mainly on providing information to the public. Although, in some cases there are also opportunities for two-way communication, according to a more interactive model, overall parliaments are not offering substantive models of citizenship or any kind of 'democratic innovations' – 'institutions that have been specifically designed to increase and deepen citizen participation in the political decision-making process' (Smith, 2009: 1). Parliaments that are

experimenting with democratic innovations are few and far between. The United Kingdom (55.6%) seems to be an exception, which reflects the ongoing work done this institution has done recently – mostly driven by the Speaker John Bercow, who set up a Commission in 2013 to investigate the opportunities digital technology can bring for parliamentary democracy in the UK. Similarly, Austria (44.4%) seems to be also paving the way in terms of consultation and participation tools. However, this institution has neglected completely communication tools such as the broadcast and webcast of its committee meetings. This is a puzzling result for two reasons, however. First, in the ladder of public engagement, parliaments seem to prioritize information over communication, and the latter over participation mechanisms. This is not the cause of Austria, however. The Austrian parliament seems to prioritize direct democracy instruments over communication tools. Second, contrary to the UK or Portugal, overall Austria is placed below the average in terms of public engagement activities and features offered by its parliamentary website. This puzzling result indicates that this case is good for in-depth comparative analysis, and therefore it will be further studied in the next chapters.

4.4 BLENDING SOCIAL MEDIA WITH PARLIAMENTARY WEBSITES

One of the highlighted results found until now is that parliaments use a variety of media tools to inform, communicate, and consult citizens. Besides the tools and features affordable by the websites, parliaments are also blending social media with their PWs. This result needs to be further developed; so before moving to the websites' delivery assessment, some additional quantitative parameters will be analysed in order to give a better picture of this 'trend.' First, for the sake of clarity, social media refers to online platforms whereby 'content and applications are no longer created and published by individuals, but instead are continuously modified by all users in a participatory and collaborative fashion'' (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

Social media are not designed to disseminate information, they have developed to support conversations; as such they may be intuitively useful for a parliamentarian (a politician) to develop a discussion with their represented, but less so for a non-partisan collective such as a legislative institution (Leston-Bandeira and Bender, 2013). Still, since around the year of 2010, parliaments have started to use social networks, mostly Facebook and Twitter, as extra channels of communication with the public (Ibid). Compared to other political

institutions, parliaments have been notably slow in joining social media. Nevertheless, as the use of social media is increasing (Buhl, 2011), parliaments have made considerable strides in the last couple of years with many now joining a social network that is still perceived as an unknown and vulnerable space for formal political institutions (Ibid). Social media have multiple opportunities and capabilities, but as well some challenges. For instance, social media users can interact in a peer-to-peer manner, publish their content alone or in collaboration with others, share it with their contacts, gather and discuss feedback, and eventually create their own markets, audiences, and communities (Blossom, 2009). Content can be posted on blogs, wikis, and podcasts, organized with tags and then shared through RSS, social networking website (SNS), and micro-blogging (Twitter) feeds (Breslin et al., 2009). Social media are cheap or free, highly customizable, easy to use and could specifically provide for a privileged channel for pro-system citizen participation (Leston-Bandeira and Bender, 2013). Besides, it allows the parliament to reach more people in different age groups. Today's teens, namely tomorrow's adults, are already alphabetized in social media and can use them in their interaction with political institutions (Osimo, 2008; Baumgarten and Chui, 2009).

However, social networks also entail some challenges, especially for a collective, traditional and formal institution such as parliament. Social media are less formal, less controlled, less rigid and more open than traditional media and then Web 1.0. In fact, 'they are less respectful of position and tradition and conversations evolve much more quickly than in the traditional media. This can be challenging for formal institutions like parliaments' (Williamson, 2013). Despite these challenges, the parliamentary community have been pushed towards 'the adoption of social media as a public engagement tool by legislatures' (Leston-Bandeira and Bender, 2013: 5). The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) adopted by unanimous vote, at its 128th Assembly in March 2013, a resolution on the use of social media, specifically focused on enhancing citizen engagement (Williamson, 2013), having also issued then a set of detailed guidelines to support parliaments in their adoption and application of social media (Williamson, 2013). What is more, Leston-Bandeira and Bender (2013) have also issued a social media guide for parliaments.

Slowly, parliaments have started to adopt social media over the last couple of years (Papaloi et al, 2012; Leston-Bandeira and Bender, 2013). The World e-parliament reports show an increase of 43% of parliaments in social media usage since 2010 to 2016. Even though, these results report to a multiple and geographical diversified scope of countries it sets a trend on the presence of parliaments on social media worldwide, which applies for the European

cases here analysed. The findings reported in Table 4.5 show that 81% of parliaments have a social media full account. This number increases to 95% if thematic accounts such as the Facebook page named 'cultural parliament' of the Portuguese parliament or the Facebook page named 'European affairs committee' of the Bulgarian parliament are included. In terms of social media variety, parliaments are mostly using Facebook and Twitter, and to a lesser extent YouTube. However, there a few parliaments also experimenting with Instagram and Flickr for instance.

Table 4.5 Parliaments' social media presence

	Full account? (any network)	No, but does it have a thematic account?
Austria	yes	
Belgium	yes	
Bulgaria	no	Yes
Croatia	no	Yes
Denmark	yes	
Estonia	yes	
Finland	yes	
France	yes	
Germany	yes	
Greece	yes	
Hungary	yes	
Ireland	yes	
Italy	yes	
Netherlands	yes	
Portugal	no	Yes
Romania	yes	
Slovakia	yes	
Slovenia	no	No
Spain	yes	
Sweden	yes	
United Kingdom	yes	

Two important factors for successful presence in social media are to stay active and flexible (Patel, 2010). Profiles need to be updated frequently and the organization behind a social media profile needs to respond to questions and discuss with users lively. Flexibility in social media management is equally important; social media platforms change fast and

organizations cannot afford to stay too behind. This is particularly difficult for political institutions, as Fyfe and Crookall (2010) as stressed ''social media are spontaneous and instantaneous, but government is slow and steady''. This is particularly true for parliaments as well. Parliaments lacks flexibility, nimbleness, and cultural shift (Serrat, 2010), since their operation sets out the lasting rules that monitor and constrain government and society.

Using social media and establishing a public strategy alongside 'represents a giant leap forward' for the culture of a parliament' (Papaloi et al., 2012: 271). So much so, that opening up social media communication channels with citizens may have repercussions not only on a parliament's legislative and monitoring role, but also to the very concept of representative democracy. Besides, 'the adoption of social media by parliaments needs to be planned and sustained with concrete and balanced goals' (Ibid: 272).

Hence, the extent to which social media is being used by parliaments, in specific the popularity and activity of parliamentary Facebook and Twitter pages, will be analysed. The analysis is focused on the most used social networks among parliaments in this study.

Selected networks: Facebook or Twitter, or both?

Social media is a range of online tools for creating and sharing content that have created new opportunities for legislatures and members of parliament. They provide 'new ways to communicate and engage with the public, consult on legislation, deliver educational resources and promote transparency' (Williamson, 2013: 7).

Social media incorporates a wide range of genres, applications and tools that has multiplied in the last years. Therefore, any political and public institution have a wide variety of different tools to choose when they embrace the idea of 'being on social media'. While in 'a traditional website, you are in charge; you define the terms of engagement and can control who takes part and how; with social media, you are not in charge' (Ibid). There are rules (formal and informal) and norms that control how the network operates and how members behave. Different networks have different norms, etiquettes and restrictions which will affect the content to publish (Leston-Bandeira and Bender, 2013). Besides each network will reach different sociodemographic audiences. Hence, many parliaments eschew certain networks to focus more precisely on those which are most optimal for their needs. This is a double-edged sword: some citizens will only be available on one or two networks, and you risk locking them out (Ibid).

In a 2013 social media guide for parliaments, Andy Williamson of the Inter-Parliamentary Union advocated that 'Twitter is good for publicizing publications, events and current opportunities for the public to get involved'. While, Facebook 'take parliament closer to the public and can work well to guide people to engagement platforms, learn more about parliament and, ultimately, get involved' (Williamson, 2013: 28). These two networks seems to be the most used by parliaments. Nevertheless, the analysis also indicates that platforms as YouTube, Instagram, Flickr and LinkedIn are being used less.

Starting the analysis by looking at some quantitative parameters, it is possible to make an x-ray of how national parliaments are using Twitter and/or Facebook. These parameters only give some information of the pages and accounts activity (data joined, number of tweets, post per day, number of pictures and videos, information on their activity) and popularity, i.e. the number of followers of Twitter profiles and likes of Facebook pages. Data was collected on January 28th of 2019 for all the cases. This analysis does not reveal the purposes beyond parliaments' usage of social media. Of course, that data would be valuable; however, it would require a larger and complex analysis of the content of posts and tweets in multiple languages, which is practical and logistical very difficult (and subjective), and given the last scandals of social media data misuse, both platforms, but specially Facebook has made it harder to collect data on their platforms through scrapping tools such as R.

Table 4.6 shows which parliaments are using Twitter at the time of data collection (January of 2019) and their activity and popularity. In Europe, the UK Parliament was the first legislature to open both a Facebook and a Twitter institutional account, in July 2008 (Leston-Bandeira and bender, 2013). However, at the chamber level, the house of commons only opened a Twitter account much later, in 2012. Ireland and Spain (the lower chamber) followed the UK parliament in June 2009. It is, however, mainly from 2011 onwards that parliaments in Europe have started to use Twitter. Parliaments' own experience in using these tools is therefore still very recent; not only do they have little past experience to refer to, but also the sharing of practices across parliaments is still limited. And despite some very active accounts, most of these accounts have very low numbers of followers; specially if it is considered the relationship between the number of followers and the number of Internet users in that country. The @Bundestag account and the @MagyarParlament seem to be inactive currently. The German parliament joined Twitter in 2015 but has never tweeted; while the Hungarian parliament joined earlier, in 2011, but since then has only tweeted 123 times and the last tweet is from April 2011 the same month it joined Twitter. It is also interesting to notice that the

German upper house, the Bundesrat, has an active Twitter profile since 2009 with 11 thousand tweets and 95 thousand followers (data not shown in the Table).

Surprisingly, there are still a few cases of Twitter profiles that are not advertised in their respective webpage of parliaments. These cases are signalled in Table 4.6 below. This seems to be a bad strategy given that the more the website and social media are connected the higher chances for public engagement.

Two other main conclusions can be made from Table 4.6. First, three parliaments have chosen to only joined Twitter, namely Germany, Greece, Sweden. However, Germany's profile is inactive but the other two are active. This represents a strategic choice to communicate though Twitter instead of Facebook. This confirms the trend already found previously that parliaments select their tools to communicate and engage with the public. Here, it is even more evident, given that both networks required the more or less same amount of expertise and time to implement. This might be the case these two parliaments choose to joined Twitter instead of Facebook because the majority of their population are on Twitter. However, a quick look at some statistics tells that it is not that case. Both in Greece and Sweden, Facebook is the most used social media network. In Greece, Facebook is used by 49,3% of the population, while only 1,81% uses Twitter. In Sweden, the numbers are different but the pattern is the same: Facebook is used by 68,8% of the population, while Twitter is used by only 3% (Source: StatCounter Global Stats). Second conclusion is that a handful of parliaments even though they firstly joined Twitter have since then also joined Facebook, namely Belgium, Italy, Netherlands, Spain and the British House of Commons (the same cannot be said to the bicameral account, which was launched at the same time in both networks). This represents a strategic choice to communicate to different audiences and in different formats. This also confirms that at least some parliaments understand the differences of communication logics beyond social networks and realize each one potential and limitations.

Table 4.6 Activity and Popularity of Parliaments Official Twitter profiles

		#Activity				*#Popularity*	
		Year	Tweets (N)	Pictures and Videos (N)	Active in the last 60 days?	Followers (N)	Ratio Followers/Internet Users$_{\phi}$
Ireland	@OireachtasNews	2009	29 900	3 789	Yes	29 600	0,66%
Spain	@Congreso_Es	2009	19 600	10 000	Yes	179 000	0,45%
Estonia	@Riigikogu	2010	6 184	509	Yes	1 682	0,14%
Netherlands	@2eKamertweets	2010	10 200	733	Yes	78 800	0,49%
Belgium	@DeKamerBE	2011	4 792	1 511	Yes	6 743	0,07%
France	@AssembleeNat	2011	13 000	----	Yes	247 000	0,44%
Hungary*	@MagyarParlament	2011	123	0	No	1 263	0,02%
Finland	@SuomenEduskunta	2012	8 438	1 527	Yes	41 000	0,80%
Greece	@PressParliament	2012	3 745	2 347	Yes	6 715	0,09%
Sweden	@Sverigesriksdag	2012	6 102	112	Yes	24 800	0,27%
UK**	@HouseofCommons	2012	16 300	2 785	Yes	251 000	0,40%
Austria	@OeParl	2014	2 585	608	Yes	10 300	0,14%
Italy	@Montecitorio	2014	15 200	5 129	Yes	206 000	0,40%
Germany	@Bundestag	2015	0	0	No	4 001	0,01%
Slovakia*	@NarodnaRadaSR	2016	9	1	Yes	43	0,00%

Note: $_{\phi}$ The ratio is based on the number of Internet users last data (June 30, 2017) collected by Internet world stats.

*It is not publicized in the home page.

UK also has a global profile for both chambers, the **@UKParliament since 2007 with 17.000 tweets.

Moving to Facebook, Table 4.7 breaks down the activity and popularity of parliaments' Facebook pages. Again, in Europe, at the lower chamber level, Ireland and Estonia were the pioneers that joined Facebook in September of 2009 and February of 2010, respectively. Again it is, however, mainly from 2011 onwards that parliaments in Europe have started to use Facebook. Austria and Finland lower chambers/parliament joined first the Facebook community and after the Twitter community. While Romania is currently solely in Facebook.

The most active pages on Facebook are the @OireachtasNews (Ireland), @Riigikogu (Estonia) and @CongresodelosDiputados (Spain). The last one is in fact an interesting case, since the lower chamber of Spain achieved the lowest performance on public engagement supply when looking at its website (data shown above); however, it has a vibrant and active performance on social media, both on Facebook and Twitter (and also including an YouTube channel and an Instagram account). Indeed, this was a surprisingly result: not only the Spanish lower chamber was one of the first to joined Twitter, as well is currently in multiple networks and is active and engaged in all. On the contrary, the German parliament was among the best PWs concerning public engagement activities; while has not yet fully invested in social media. Besides, the YouTube channel created in April of 2016, which is not advertised in parliament' website homepage, the Twitter account created in 2015 is currently inactive and to our knowledge there is no Facebook page.

Comparing both Tables 4.6 and 4.7, is possible to point out that a handful of parliaments have chosen to join both networks at the same time. Turning back to this section' title question on which network to select - 'Facebook or Twitter, or both?', these are the parliaments that clearly answered 'both' to that question. This acknowledges that parliaments understand and take into account the differences between these networks, their different audiences, forms of communication and style. These are the cases of Ireland (2009), Estonia (2010), France (2011), Hungary (2011) and Slovakia (2016). Regardless of when they joined both networks, nowadays 61,9% of the European parliaments here analysed are present both in Twitter and Facebook[56]. This strategy requires parliaments and parliamentary staff to split up between two different online communities, which requires time, resources and dominate different forms of communication. For instance, Facebook typically takes a friendlier style, whilst Twitter takes a more 'bullet-pointed' rapid-fire style. While YouTube and other Vlog (Video Blog) website can take a variety of styles: documentary, talk-to-camera, chat show, or editing existing

[56] This corresponds to 13 parliaments out of 21.

material (Leston-Bandeira and Bender, 2013). Therefore, being active and engaging in both networks raises challenges to parliaments, namely requires these institutions to engage in a new style of communication beyond the traditional institutional one. The set of parliaments that are currently in both networks, all have been more or less active in both, however with different degrees of popularity. For instance, the Austrian, Belgian, Finish, Dutch, Spanish and British Twitter profiles are more popular than their respective Facebook pages; while, the Estonia, French, Hungarian, Irish, Italian and Slovakian are more popular in Facebook rather in Twitter.

Finally, most parliaments typically have a single 'main' profile, encompassing all parliamentary work, but mainly focused on the political work. Some bicameral parliaments have a main profile for each chamber, others maintain one bicameral feed, whilst a small number adopt three feeds, one bicameral and one for each chamber. And there also the case of a few parliaments that do not have a main profile but have specific thematic profiles for specific purposes. For instance, the Portuguese parliament has at the time of this writing three thematic Facebook pages: one for the parliament of youth, other for the broadcast and webcast channel, and a third one for cultural events happening in the parliament. This might represent a certain caution from parliaments in approaching social media. This certainly describes the Portuguese case, a topic that will be further developed in this thesis.

Table 4.7. Activity and Popularity of Parliaments Official Facebook pages

		#Activity				*#Popularity*	
		Year	Posts per day	Active in the last 60 days?	Users can post?	Total Page likes (N)	Ratio Likes/Internet Users*
Ireland	@OireachtasNews	2009	1,6	Yes	No	5 070	0,11
Estonia	@Riigikogu	2010	1,7	Yes	Yes	12 354	1,03
Austria	@OeParl	2011	1	Yes	Yes	6 549	0,09
Finland	@SuomenEduskunta	2011	0,1	Yes	No	5 899	0,12
France	@AssembleeNationale	2011	0,8	Yes	No	105 584	0,19
Hungary	@orszaggyules	2011	0,1	Yes	No	5 408	0,07
Denmark	@folketinget	2013	0,2	Yes	No	52 099	0,93
Romania	@cameradeputatilor	2013	0,4	Yes	No	33 155	0,23
Netherlands	@tweede,kamer	2014	0,6	Yes	No	9 581	0,06
Italy	@Cameradeideputati	2015	0,1	Yes	No	42 022	0,08
Spain	@CongresodelosDiputados	2015	2,1	Yes	No	16 077	0,04
Slovakia*	@NarodnaRadaSR	2016	0,2	Yes	Yes	1 378	0,03
UK**	@HouseofCommons	2016	0,4	Yes	No	44 397	0,07
Belgium	@dekamer.lachambre.be	2017	0,3	Yes	No	1 619	0,02

Note: *The ratio is based on the number of Internet users (June 30, 2017) collected by the Internet world stats.

UK also has a global profile for both chambers, the **@UKParliament since 2008

4.5 PARLIAMENTARY WEBSITES' DELIVERY

At this point, this chapter has mainly addressed the content of PWs, including its features and tools, however the second component of interest when one analyses websites is their effectiveness in delivering those tools, features, activities and information promoting public engagement. Specially, since citizens can acquire information and deliver their voices to the legislatures only through effective PWs (Sobaci, 2012).

While judging the 'effectiveness' of website is in large part a subjective issue, some attempt at measurement can be made by specifying some generic factors that enhance the experience of the user in accessing and navigating the website. While the 'beauty' of these features is very much in the eye of the beholder, the effectiveness of these features and tools can be measured (Gibson and Ward, 2002). Delivery can be broken down into three basic components: *usability or ease of navigability, accessibility, and responsiveness* (Gibson and Ward, 2000), which will be all assessed individually in the next sections. Now, however, let us look at all the aspects that measure website's delivery in comparison across parliaments.

Table 4.8 reports the indexes values for each of the basic components of websites' delivery. Higher values equal better performance, except for the usability index which represents the average number of mouse clicks necessary to reach the information or features from the home page.

The results show that there is a long way to go to achieve effective PWs. For instance, features to promote an accessible website, such as sign language and facilities for the blind, were not commonly used. Most PWs are not even half way the path to a full accessible website for all citizens. Furthermore, ensuring a good level of responsiveness was one aspect of delivery that most PWs seemed to lack. The majority did not reply to our query – a request for information –which reveals at some extent a lack of responsiveness. However, in terms of the usability, the vast majority of PWs are easy to navigate.

Comparing these results with the results on the content of PWs is interesting to note that an 'engaging website' is not necessarily and 'effective website' and vice versa. For instance, although Croatia and Ireland are below the average of parliaments supply on public engagement activities (content) they present 'effective websites', i.e. responsive, user-friendly and, at some extent, accessible websites. The contrary is also true, both Denmark and France, for instance, are leading the way on the content and features promoting public engagement, but

still have much to improve in terms of its effectiveness. These results stress, once more, the importance of assessing both the provision of content and the delivery of PWs. Only this way, it is possible to get a complete picture of parliament's online public engagement supply. The next sections will address these three components individually.

Table 4.8 Websites' delivery: indexes

	Usability [mean]	Accessibility [0-3]	Responsiveness *(speed)* [0-5]	Responsiveness *(quality)* [0-1]
Austria	2,15	3	4	1
Bulgaria	1,80	2	0	0
Belgium	2,00	1	0	0
Croatia	2,00	1	3	1
Denmark	2,50	2	0	0
Estonia	2,18	1	5	1
Finland	1,65	1	0	0
France	2,41	1	0	0
Germany	2,00	3	0	0
Greece	1,83	1	0	0
Hungary	2,04	2	0	0
Ireland	2,36	1	5	1
Italy	2,12	1	0	0
Portugal	1,90	3	0	0
Romania	2,15	1	0	0
Slovakia	2,00	1	0	0
Slovenia	3,59	1	5	1
Spain	2,17	1	0	0
Sweden	1,70	3	3	1
Netherlands	2,86	1	0	0
United Kingdom	2,74	1	3	1
Mean score	2,19	1,52	1,52	0,57
Range	0-n	0-3	0-5	0-1

Usability

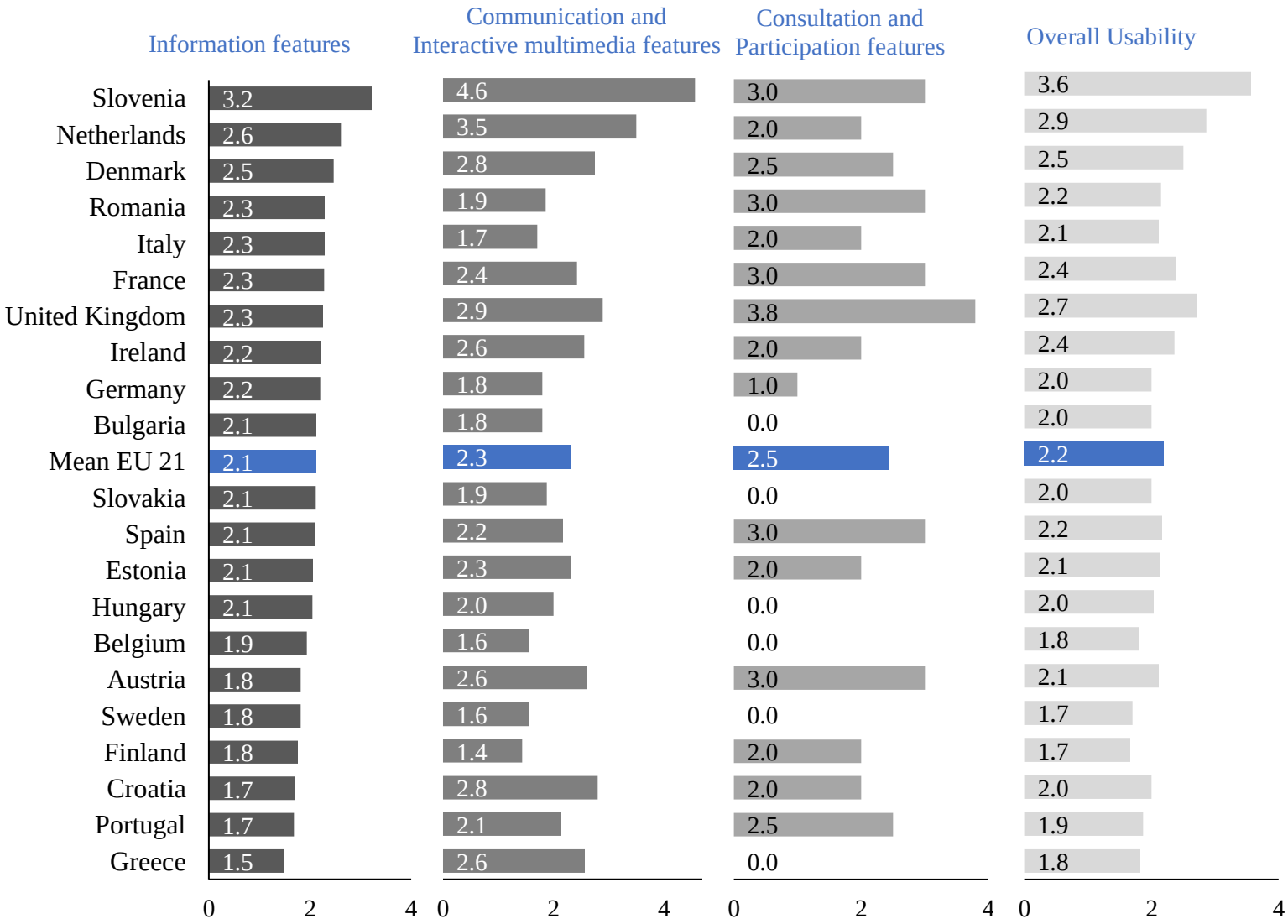
The usability of a website[57] is an essential factor that determines whether a website is eventually successful. If users of the website cannot find what they need (i.e., the website has poor usability), then they can easily switch to an alternative website that is easier to use because the Internet often offers almost endless alternatives (Kortum and Acemyan, 2016).

Chapter III has already pointed out that our measure of Web usability is less than perfect and there are other possible measurement options. Nevertheless, previous research has proven that mouse clicks represent a reasonable proxy for usability, because the more links a user has to select in order to find the information/feature/tool they are seeking, the more likely it is that they are having difficulty finding that information or that they will commit an error in the search (Kortum and Acemyan, 2016). Hence the so-called 'Three-Click Rule,' which, states that users should ideally be able to reach their intended destination within three mouse clicks (Zeldman, 2001). This 'rule' is based on the idea that each click is an extra step/trouble for the website user, so longer paths are worse than shorter paths, all else being equal. Even though there are some criticisms over this rule, that indicates the number of clicks is not what is important to users, but whether or not they're successful at finding what they're seeking (Nielsen and Loranger, 2006), it is possible to use it as a guide (opposed to a rule used for Web designers) in the analysis of PWs usability. Furthermore, Leston-Bandeira and Thompson (2013) guide on 'using parliamentary websites as an engagement tool' has advocated for the use of the three click 'rule' given that 'structurally parliamentary websites tend to be top-heavy, with an abundance of information presented on homepages', which can 'cause confusion and can be particularly off- putting for first time visitors as well as those who are not familiar with the institution itself' (2013: 4). Thus, 'using the 'three click rule' where possible will assist parliaments in ensuring the accessibility of information' (Ibid).

Table 4.8 already presented the average usability of PWs, measured by the number of mouse clicks necessary to reach the information or tools from the homepage. However, figure 4.3 presents a detailed picture on the differences on the PWs' usability across the three main dimensions of online public engagement.

[57] It is important to differentiate accessibility and usability. The primary focus of accessibility is access by people with disabilities while usability focuses on the elements of learnability, memorability, effectiveness, efficiency and satisfaction for all website users (Henry, 2002).

Figure 4.3 Websites Usability: Average of mouse clicks from the homepage



Starting by the last column, figure 4.4 shows that most websites comply with the three-click rule. The Finish and Swedish PWs allow a great deal of information and features to be accessed with just a few clicks of the mouse. These websites are extremely user friendly because they provide access to a great deal of information and features with just a few clicks. In general, as website increase in size it becomes more difficult to maintain navigability; and PWs as well e-government services websites may have to cover a broader range of subjects and provide a great deal of information and documents which, ultimately, can be a challenge for navigability (Cox et al., 2006) This seems to be the case of the Slovenian parliamentary website, where the user needs a few more clicks to access the same information and features. This is the only parliamentary website that does not comply with the three click rule, which is mainly due to the high number of clicks needed to find the features of communication and interactive multimedia. Nevertheless, there are very small differences among parliaments, which indicates that parliaments in general are aware, at some extent, of the importance of Web design and users' usability. This also indicates that parliaments possible consider the users experience and satisfaction with the website in its design. Data also indicates that overall the features and tools promoting citizens engagement with parliamentary activities are accessible to them. This means the engagement of citizens in parliamentary affairs is a few clicks away.

Moving to specific features and content in the PWs it is important to ask if it *would be more difficult to find participatory tools rather information on* PWs*?* The answer is yes. The more complex and difficult are the activities of public engagement, the more mouse clicks are necessary to find those features and tools. A bivariate correlation was only found between usability and the consultation and participation index (ρ=0.442). This means that parliaments with better supply of participatory tools have in general lower website usability (i.e higher number of clicks)[58].. This is an important point since the success of these participatory tools and mechanisms is exclusively dependent on their usage by citizens. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily mean that the overall usability quality of participatory tools and features is bad; it means that in average it takes more steps to find participatory tools rather communication or information features. Also, this is not entirely true for every single case here analysed but for most of the parliaments, as figure 4.4 shows.

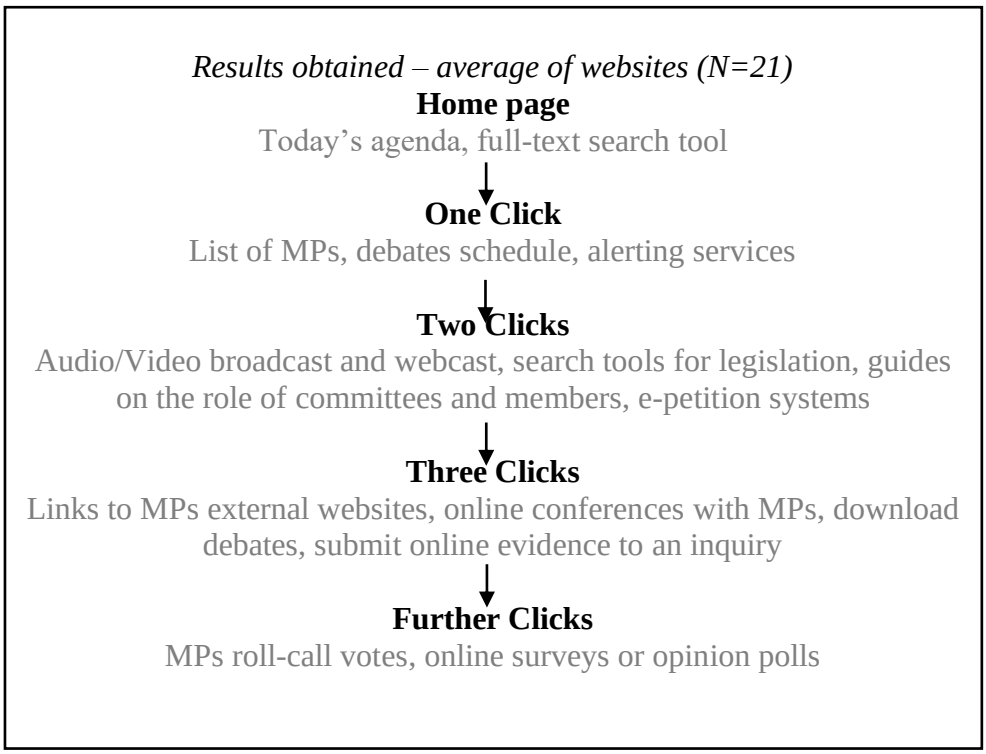
Additionally, Netherlands, Denmark, Ireland, Estonia, Croatia, and Greece PWs' seem to have difficulties of providing short paths for communication features, which might be due

[58] Other correlations were tested, here is so presented the one that is statistically significant. For the details on other correlations tested see Appendix C, Table C1.

to the fact that several audio and visual archives of plenary sessions and parliamentary committees are usually housed in sub domains outside the main website, which increases the path to reach it. While, Romania, Italy, Finland, Sweden, Bulgaria and Slovakia have found shorter paths to users reach their communication and interactive multimedia content.

Figure 4.4 reports a flow chart of the average number of clicks necessary to reach specific information or features for the 21 PWs analysed in this dissertation. The main take way is that, in average, PWs allow a great deal of information to be accessed with just a few clicks of the mouse. The website users' need to make fewer or none clicks to access simpler information, such as today's agenda, and a few more clicks for more complex information and features such as submit evidence to an inquiry.

Figure 4.4 A flow chart of navigability among the 21 websites



Although as previously reported, consultation and participation tools are, overall, the ones less accessible in PWs. Additionally, as the flow chart highlights the records of MPs are not so accessible as should be as well – on average access to the records take more than 4 clicks from the homepage. In fact, MPs voting records are the second most inaccessible feature of PWs in our dataset. More or less the same number of clicks to find an online poll or survey (which is the most inaccessible in general). The disclosure of MPs voting behaviour is one of

the most important elements of electoral accountability, however. Public access to official information allows the impact of political decisions to be assessed, therefore improving accountability (Fox, 2007). Parliaments around the world differ how voting decisions of their members are made transparent: while some record and publicly disclose all individual voting decisions of their MPs (i.e., who voted yes or no on a certain proposal), others tend not to disclose the majority of votes (Hug, 2009). The literature on legislative transparency emphasizes that voters as ultimate principals, in a principal-agent relationship, should benefit from vote transparency. It allows voters to identify MPs who do not adhere to their campaign promises. If they do not represent the electorate's preferences well, voters can punish their MPs by not re-electing them (Benesch et al. 2018). Thus, if MPs roll-call records are not easily accessible or disclosed at all, there is a critic issue of lack of transparency and consequently of political and electoral accountability

Nevertheless, when parliaments fail to provide that information, others organizations take action. As show by the increasingly appearance of parliamentary monitoring organizations (PMOs) or parliamentary informatic projects across Europe (but not exclusively) that provide clear and accessible information on MPs votes and other specific information (Ostling, 2012). They merge data in ways that allow citizens or civil society organizations to extract specific information of their interest, including in most of the times the voting pattern of a party on a particular topic (Ostling, 2012), such as 'TheyWorkForYou (TWFY)'[59] in UK or the recent 'Hemiciclo'[60] in Portugal. By facilitating access to official information, they enable citizens to demand explanations from their representatives, thereby backing soft accountability - the possibility to call those in authority to justify their decisions (Fox 2007). These platforms change the 'terms of democratic visibility, using digital technologies to establish a citizen-centric, needs-based approach to parliamentary transparency' (Coleman, 2010: 91).

An Oxford Internet Survey (OxIS) of 2009 inquired the users of the website 'TheyWorkForYou', and one of the results found was that 'British users often highlighted that TWFY is more usable than government websites' (Escher 2011: 29). However, there are also concerns that parliamentary monitoring activities may, when conducted without sufficient rigor

[59] TheyWorkForYou is a website, launched in 2004, that provides detailed information on members of parliament (including their voting behaviour and expenses) as well as parliamentary proceedings such as debates. It covers the Westminster and the Scottish parliaments as well as the Northern Ireland Assembly. TFWY was the first initiative of its kind worldwide (Coleman, 2010)

[60] Hemiciclo is a website, launched in 2017, that provides detailed information on the members votes in the Portuguese parliament.

or caution, do more to increase cynicism of political processes than to stimulate reform (Mandelbaum, 2011). There is still much to learn on these organizations and their impact on the pollical processes. For this reason, this will be further developed along the case studies in Chapter VII.

Nevertheless, the results from the OxIS survey stress again the importance of including the PWs navigability and usability in the studies of parliamentary online engagement. In addition, this stresses once more that parliaments need to consider these issues when managing their websites and follow the set of detailed guidelines already published by experts and inter-parliamentary organizations to support parliaments in their adoption and application of digital media.

Finally, it is also important to highlight that this type of data is particularly important and innovative, since usability is considered a fundamental property for the success of any website (Matera et al., 2006). It has also been absent from related scholarship, which has not privileged the evaluation of content usability or the quality, accuracy, or even depth of the information provided. Andrew Chadwick has highlighted the importance of measuring websites usability in e-democracy studies: 'Data on the ways in which citizens navigate around website and the information they perceive as most valuable, measured by the time they spend, the clicks they perform […] can be used to shape the design and delivery of services' (2009: 39). Chadwick highlights the importance and value of measuring websites usability from the perspective of Web designers and those responsible for the websites, which might ultimately use that information to adjust the website, thus improving the users 'experience. From the point of view of research, looking at this type of data allows a better understanding of the phenomenon of how parliaments are using the Internet and ICTs to promote public engagement. It is not enough to just assess and describe how parliaments are doing it; it is also important to see how effective parliaments are doing it: is the information and other engaging tools accessible and easy to reach within the website? Especially since people's expectations have expanded with the massive expansion of the Web and now people assume that websites work and do not want to waste much time or effort to find the information they want (Leston-Bandeira and Thompson, 2013).

Accessibility

Although a website may be user-friendly, this will be at some extent undermined if the website is not accessible for a wide audience. Indeed, this is the case of many PWs in Europe, as shown previously by Table 4.9 – i.e. even though they are user friendly they are not yet fully accessible to all.

From its inception, the World Wide Web (WWW) was conceived and implemented as a platform-neutral, device-independent means of accessing information. Tim Berners-Lee, inventor and director of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), which is responsible to promote a global Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI), stated that 'The power of the Web is in its universality'. Despite this emphasis, many Websites seem to ignore issues of content accessibility, including public and political institutions websites (Sullivan and Matson, 2000). Parliamentary website are gateways for the public to access information and services. Therefore, if a PW is difficult to use or not accessible for a part of the population, it will be far less effective in helping to achieve the goal of openness and engagement (Leston-Bandeira and Bender, 2013).

Accessibility means designing a user interface that is not only effective, efficient and achieving user satisfaction, but also inclusive of more people in more situations (Hoi-Yan and Zaphiris, 2003). Standards for usability and accessibility have been developed over a number of years and best practices have been established. In addition, a set of tests and techniques have been developed to for ensure that a website is understandable to its intended audiences. In 2012, the Inter-parliamentary survey on parliaments world-wide reported that only 38% of parliaments employ these practices, however.

Regardless of the aim of the content, the website must be accessible to a wide variety of audiences, including people with diverse cultural backgrounds, speaking different languages and people with disabilities. As communication technology becomes more affordable and widespread, disabilities become one of the most significant causes of the digital divide (Griffith and Leston-Bandeira, 2012). This is why national and international standards have been developed to begin to address this problem. However, the same IPU report of 2012 reported that 55% of parliaments do not follow such standards. Table 4.9 corroborate this, there is much more space to improve. Not so surprisingly the majority of parliaments still lack a valid option for disable people. However, it is a surprise that the British parliament which are paving the way on e-engagement fails to assure some level of accessibility for disable people. The same

occurs for the possibilities to access the Web content on different languages. The British parliamentary website does not include foreign languages in its website. This is especially perplexing given that 'providing access to languages other than English does not require a high-tech solution and it doesn't take new technology or expensive commitments' (West, 2008: 37).

Content accessibility issues are often, though not exclusively, focused on accessibility for users with disabilities. However, an accessible parliamentary website also means to include people speaking different languages. Moreover, there are proactive features a website can include that indicate an organization's commitment to accessibility, such as foreign language translations or software for the visually impaired (Gibson and Ward, 2000). The Declaration on Parliamentary Openness (2012) includes a call for information to be broadly accessible to all citizens through multiple channels, including print, live and on-line broadcasts. It specifies that citizens should have physical access to parliament and access to parliamentary information that is free and available in multiple languages. For instance, in 2012, the access to PWs in multiple languages was established by IPU has one of the short measures of success to enhance the connection between legislatures and constituencies (2010-2020). The data compiled in this thesis shows that non-English parliaments manage to provide at least some part of its content in a foreign language. Even among parliaments of countries with only one official language, many are attempting to address the needs of a multi-lingual citizenry. However, as mentioned previously the majority of the foreign languages' versions are still very incomplete. Belgium is the second exception to this pattern, however. The Belgium website includes two options, French and Dutch translations, however does not include an English option. While, the Swedish parliament provides multiple options of languages (more than 5) for its user to choose, including Arabic. This is particularly important in federal states and countries with more than one official language; as well in increasing multicultural societies where the number of languages spoken are vast.

Due to the expected diversity of users, the website content must be accessible and inclusive of all citizens, regardless of their political skills and literacy levels. Parliament, like all political institutions, has its own specific language, which 'is often seen as confusing and a barrier to greater public involvement' (UNEP, 2016: 72). Parliamentary information often deals with legal and complex language than can be difficult to understand. A number of parliaments have begun to recognize the importance of providing additional explanations for bills and legislative actions in layman terms, i.e. understandable to layman citizens (IPU, 2012). In addition to the challenge of understanding legislative texts, there is the challenge of

understanding legislative procedures. Standing orders and the rules of procedure can seem obscure and arcane to many citizens and in some cases even to new members joining the parliament. Moreover, the complexity of legislative procedures can be an impediment to the transparency of parliaments. These concerns are particularly relevant given that citizens' lack of familiarity with the legislative process is the challenge cited by most parliaments (56%) when trying to use technology to improve communication (IPU, 2012). Please note that the analysis on this issue was not entirely extensive since it was not assessed if every information/feature/tool was easy to understand or written in layman language in the PWs. This kind of analysis, although important, would be very subjective and unfeasible given the many different languages of the countries included in the analysis.

Nevertheless, the PWs were analysed to assess if they offer any feature on their homepages that provide a less complex version of the website to users. Findings show that parliaments still have much to do on this concern. Only three parliaments are providing some form of 'easy language feature' at the time of the data collection. Austria, Germany, and Sweden are paving the way on these concerns. There are also other parliaments studying these possibilities, such as the British parliament which is testing to include a 'jargon buster' – people will receive a pop-up question on their difficulty to understand political issues and if they answered that it is difficult to them, then they are presented with a different version of the website, in which there are explanations for complex words.

Table 4.9 Websites' accessibility breakdown into its components

	Sign Language/ audio version	Easy language	Non-native language accessibility
Austria	X	X	2 (English and French)
Belgium	X*		1 (Dutch)
Bulgaria			1 (English)
Croatia			1 (English)
Denmark	X		1 (English)
Estonia			1 (English)
Finland			1 (English)
France			1 (English)
Germany	X	X	3 (English, French, Arabic)
Greece			2 (English and French)
Hungary	X		1 (English)
Ireland			1 (Gaeilge)
Italy			2 (English and French)
Netherlands			1 (english)
Portugal	X		2 (English and French)
Romania			1 (French)
Slovakia			1 (English)
Slovenia			1 (English)
Spain			1 (English)
Sweden	X	X	Several languages
UK			None

Note: *However, it is not clearly indicated in the home page of the Belgium PW.

Responsiveness

The final element that measures the website delivery is the capacity with which the website responds to a relatively simple and specific request for information (Gibson and Ward, 2000). This can be called 'responsiveness' and can be broken down into two components: the speed of response and the quality of the response, in terms if the reply was relevant or irrelevant for the query. Following Gibson (2000: 308) framework 'if a website's function is identified as promoting participation or information provision, then this serves as a measure of how well it delivers on those goals'. The results are presented in Table 4.10.

Table 4.3 Websites' Responsiveness (speed and quality)

	Response	Speed of response	Quality of response
Austria	X	Next day	Relevant
Belgium	-	-	-
Bulgaria	-	-	-
Croatia	X	3 days	Relevant
Denmark	-	-	-
Estonia	X	Same day	Relevant
Finland	-	-	-
France	-	-	-
Germany	-	-	-
Greece	-	-	-
Hungary	-	-	-
Ireland	X	Same day	Relevant
Italy	-	-	-
Netherlands	-	-	-
Portugal	X	Next day	Relevant
Romania	-	-	-
Slovakia	-	-	-
Slovenia	X	Same day	Relevant
Spain	-	-	-
Sweden	X	4 days	Relevant
UK	X	4 days	Relevant

I found a 33,3% response rate for the query. The response speed range between responses on the same day and four days later. Nevertheless, all the replies were relevant for the query. However, most parliaments failed to answer a simple query about the information provided by the website. This certainly shows that parliaments need to work on their interaction with the public through the available communication channels. Nevertheless, this result should be interpreted with caution and without failing into the temptation of generalize it; i.e. this does not reveal anything about how the parliamentary groups and MPs, individually, interact and answer the queries they received though their own channels. Additionally, since the query was written in English, this might influence the response rate, given that some parliaments might not have the resources available for replying in English. However, this also relates to the accessibility of the website and the importance to speak and communicate to a multilingual and multicultural societies nowadays.

4.6 SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

The first look at the structure of political websites across twenty-one European democracies has revealed three main conclusions. First, *parliaments are selective* in their strategies for engaging with the public. Second, in their selectivity, most parliaments choose to *invest largely in information provision*, leaving other activities of public engagement as secondary. Third, parliaments still have *a long way to pursue in the way they delivery* public engagement activities to their audiences.

The results clearly show that *parliaments are selective*, which was also corroborated by the weight they place on different ways of promoting public engagement when looking at the aggregate indicators. Instead of blindly amassing all the characteristics that are theoretically desirable and practically available for choice, they carefully choose which ones to include and which ones to forgo according to strategic considerations. These findings corroborate the systematic data gathered by the Inter-parliamentary Union through the years (2010, 2012, 2014, 2016) and are similar to those found for other political actors such as candidates and parties' websites, for instance in the work of Cristian Vaccari (2013). They are also consistent with the idea that political actors adjust their messaging tools, including digital media, according to their interests, ideas, resources, and communication environment.

Evidence was found not only that parliaments are selective with respect how much weight they place on different ways of promoting engagement, such as informing, communicating and participating but *selectivity* is also revealed in the specific functions that parliaments emphasize within these domains, as shown by the three-tiered distribution of the information, communication/interaction, and consultation/participation characteristics.

Acknowledging selectivity by parliaments allows one to more fruitfully focus on the conditions under which they adopt certain online tools rather than stopping at the descriptive proposition that most of them underutilize some of the affordances of digital media— they certainly do, as the average index scores have shown, but a more in- depth look shows a more nuanced scenario. Such an approach may also enable us to understand why some parliaments in some contexts build outstanding digital presences that clearly deviate from the modal outcome, while others perform at much lower levels than average, which will be the topic of the next chapter.

Second, most parliaments choose to *invest largely in information provision*, leaving other activities of public engagement as secondary. Regarding the main research question, this finding might indicate several scenarios. At one hand, it might indicate a tendency on the part of parliaments to consciously avoid taking greater risks of actively engaging citizens in a more substantive way and to choose public engagement activities that are easier to implement (i.e. supplying information rather than consultation and participation tools). On the other hand, parliaments might not be offering more substantive ways of public engagement tools and activities simply because they lack important financial and human resources to pursue that. Regardless of the scenario, such outcomes coincide with other empirical findings that underline the preference of various parliaments to prioritise information provision over participatory tools (Norris, 2001a; Trechsel et al., 2003; Triga and Milioni, 2014). These two explanations, among others, will be assessed in the next chapters.

Furthermore, even though parliaments are still using ICTs to provide information, which should not be underestimated, some evidence of opportunities for two-way communication, according to a more interactive model, emerged in a large group of countries. An example of how parliaments are becoming more interactive is the increasingly number of parliaments blending social media in their PWs. Even though parliaments are still timidly embracing the opportunities brought by social networks to become more interactive, such as Facebook and twitter (the networks most chosen) they are experimenting the use of social networks to interact with citizens in a different context – even if it is with the solely. Despite the recent explosion of social networking taking place in Europe, it takes time for political institutions, such as parliaments, to adapt as the traditional structure and hierarchy does not always foster or accelerate innovative trends.

Additionally, evidence of *more substantive engagement* is also emerging but in a small group of countries. This is not the case for the majority of parliaments, however. Some did not include any substantive public engagement activity in their repertoire of engagement activities. An example is the few 'democratic innovations', features and tools specifically designed to introduce the public's view into the decision making process, such in Austria. There is still much more to learn about these current experiences taking place in Europe. Therefore, this will be analysed in more detailed in the next chapter.

Despite the variation found, overall parliaments perform well in terms of online public engagement. The same cannot be said in regards the quality of the websites' delivery, however. This thesis reports many cases where *parliaments are neglecting important delivery functions*

such as accessibility to all audiences, including disable people, and responsiveness. The websites are usually easy to navigate; yet, evidence shows that parliaments have more difficulty to assure a good usability for the provision of participatory tools, which are the ones that exclusively depend upon citizens usage and ultimately is closely linked to the possible success or unsuccess of the participatory tools. Furthermore, parliaments are not completely assuring that the websites content and features is accessible to all audiences. Even though, there are various good practices and standards available for ensuring the accessibility of a website, making it not only intuitively easier to navigate but also accessible to those who might have different needs; parliaments are failing on this regard. Besides, the majority also failed our responsiveness test; many parliaments did not reply to a simple request of information and help navigating the website.

Launching e-democracy projects, integrating the public in the policy making process by giving their opinions, and adding interactivity through social media, demonstrates responsiveness and a willingness to connect. However, most parliaments fail to take advantage of digital media to fully integrate the public in the policy making process. Most parliaments are holding back from encouraging strong and active citizenship. This paradigm seems to surpass a more holistic view of democracy that seeks to support and listen to a powerful citizen voice. Establishing meaningful connections, transparency, information, and accountability between citizens and parliaments requires more than just putting up webpages and portals for electronic services (Salovaara, 2015). Whilst access to the Internet is currently expanding rapidly, citizens in many countries do not have assured meaningful connections with their parliament or any form of participation in the policy making process - ICTs can play a key role in helping institutions to get there, but parliaments and its actors are essential to trully achieve this goal.

CHAPTER V

SUBSTANTIVE FORMS OF E-ENGAGEMENT SUPPLY IN EUROPE – QUALITATIVE ASPECTS

The previous chapter dove into different dimensions of public engagement. There is now a better understanding of how parliaments are *informing*, *communicating* and *consulting* their citizens. These three dimensions represent lesser to more intensive public engagement activities somewhere along the spectrum of public engagement. The final category is where more substantive engagement occurs. In consultation and participation, interactions, dialogue and, ideally, deliberation take place. Rather than simply exchanging information, members of both sides (parliaments and participants/citizens) allow the possibility of their views being changed. Therefore, given the theoretical importance of this dimension, and also the relevance of the results previously found - evidence of *substantive engagement* emerging in a small group of countries-, this chapter offers a closer look at these cases.

Three strategies of substantive engagement are discussed in detailed in this chapter. The main aim is to enrich the quantitative results of the comparative website analysis by looking at how or by what mechanism the public might be consulted and participate through the existent tools for substantive engagement. In all three strategies, computer networks or digital media are being used. These strategies are *online discussions* (online forums and social media); *crowdsourcing platforms ('the Wisdom of Crowds');* and *single-click citizenship tools* (e-petitions, citizens initiatives and voting tools). The choice of one of these strategies, or a combination of them, will have a strong impact on the potential of democracy, given their democratic innovative character and potential for 'changing the game' in representative democracies today.

The chapter is organized in three main sections. First, section 5.1 starts with a brief theoretical introduction on the role ICT plays to enhance new models of democratic procedures, and specifically substantive engagement opportunities. Then, section 5.2 presents the strategies in place promoting substantive engagement. This section characterizes and compares the strategies of substantive engagement promoted by parliaments, always within the institutional context of the country where parliaments operate. Finally, section 5.3 summarizes the main findings and connects the empirical findings to the previous chapters, and casts some questions for the next chapters.

5.1 THE ROLE OF ICT: A POSSIBLE ENABLER FOR 'MORE DEMOCRACY'?

The role of ICT, digital media and Internet has been extensively addressed in the literature and was also tackled in the main theoretical chapter of this thesis. Nevertheless, since this chapter is focused on substantive forms of public engagement and new forms of democracy afforded by digital media, a brief note should be presented on the role of ICT to promote the participation of citizens.

As mentioned before, Internet has become the default medium of choice to provide citizens with access to political and public-policy information, hitherto unparalleled in history of democratic governance (Chakrabarty, 2015). ICTs offer powerful tools for searching, selecting, and integrating the vast amounts of information held by the public administration, as well as for presenting the results in a form that can be readily used by individual citizens. The effective engagement of citizens by political institutions rests on their recognition of access to information as a basic precondition, communication and interaction as central to a close dialogue, and consultation and participation as essential to policy making. The new tools offered by ICTs can provide assistance in each of these domains. Specifically, for the promotion of consultation and participatory instruments, some Internet features, such as, interaction, horizontal communication structure, lack of government censorship, and fairly low cost, can support these instruments (Barber et al., 1997; Tsagarousianou et al., 1998).

However, deliberation and advocacy systems still encompass some problems and challenges, some might be amplified by the virtual world, and others may be mitigated by it.

A continual challenge for deliberative democracy theory has been the *problem of scale*. The very effort to achieve both political equality and mass participation, both premises of a deliberative democratic system, poses impediments to deliberation on such a scale (Fishikin, 2009). By other words, the problem is the following: deliberative decisions appear to be illegitimate for those left outside the forum, while bringing more than a few people in would seem to turn the event into speech-making, not deliberation (Parkinson, 2006). This can shortly be defined as 'the scale is too big, the quality of talk too low' problem (Parkinson and Mansbridge, 2012: 65). Beetham (1991) has adressed this issue, arguing that since there will always be more people affected than active deciders, the deciders should be both authorized to decide by everyone else, and held accountable to everyone else for the procedures and quality of their decisions. In sum, the issue of scale represents a twofold challenge: the necessary

volume of participants is large and must be representative[61]; and the requirement for a large geographical scope. The solution would be to find a representative sample; in theory, if a scientific sample could deliberate online, it could save many of the costs of such a scale. Besides, virtual space instantaneously overcomes the limits of geography (Fishikin, 2009).

Besides the issue of scale, participation, and specifically deliberation, instruments entails another chanllenge: the *quality of deliberation* and *who participates* in it. These are two aditional concerns that arise from an attempt to apply microcosmic deliberation to (but not only) virtual spaces. They are interesically connected, since the lack of diversity among those deliberating can, in itself, be a limitation to the quality of deliberation. First, there is the recruitment of a scientific sample, for which the digital divide poses a challenge (Norris, 2001). 'Many of the people who would normally be drawn into a random sample of the population are not online' (Fishkin, 2009: 169). Those who lack access tend to be poorer and less educated -if they are left out, then the microcosm will surely be unrepresentative. Second, the quality of deliberation depends on several criteria, such as acess to *information*; a *substantive balance* between arguments from different sides; *diversity of positions* in the discussion; *conscientiousness among participants*, they must sincerely weigh the merits of the arguments; and *equal consideration* of arguments offered by all participants. Some of these criteria are particular dificult to achieve in a virtual space, such as conscientiousness among participants. Some are addresed by the institutional design of the instrument and others depend on the dispositions of how the participants engage in the process (Fishikin, 2009).

In sum, the provision of substantive forms of citizens participation and deliberation still entails a few challenges. Some of them were briefly discussed here. Some are intrinsic to the deliberative process itself – in which Internet and ICT may mitigate some challeges but at the same time it carries others . Nevertheless, some good results have been possible through online deliberation with a scientific sample adapted to virtual space over the years (Fishkin, 2009), but further evidence is still necessary. In sum, virtual spaces can moderate some of the challenges of advocacy and deliberative institutions as well inflate others, but there might be the case that 'with good random sampling and an effective motivation to participate, the process should avoid participatory distortion' (Fishkin, 2009: 171).

The dimension of consultation and participation tools encompasses multiple opportunities to gather citizens' inputs into the policy making decision process, with different

[61] Random selection provides a kind of legitimacy to their deliberation, not because they will somehow mirror the public as a whole, but because they promote political equality and better deliberation (Parkinson 2006a: 74).

levels of involvment, such as online surveys or opinion polls (closed answers), online debates with MPs and citizens (with reply), online advisory committees, citizens discussion forum, submission of online evidence to an inquiry, ccollective appeals/citizens initiatives, commenting bills, electronic petitions, and voting online on a specific public issue. These tools, procedures and platforms represent a choice made by parliaments in terms of participant selection, form of communication, and the extent of empowerment of the participatory procedure (Fung 2015). Table 5.1 shows that electronic petition is the most direct democracy institution used. The majority of parliaments have, at some extent, an electronic petition in place (for more details on the different types of electronic petitions see Chapter III). While online advisory committees are not even a reality for any of the parliaments in the study. Despite their common logic to complement (or supplement) representative democratic institutions, the design principles and functioning of these instruments differ in a number of ways. Besides, the same tool might be different along diverse political and social contexts. The next section will account for the many shapes and formats these instruments may take.

Table 5.1 Consultation and Participation activities among 21 European parliaments

	Online surveys/ opinion polls	*Online debates- MPs - citizens*	*Online advisory committees*	*Citizens discussion forum*	*Submit online evidence to an inquiry*	*Collective appeals/ Citizens Initiatives*	*Commen- - ting bills*	*E- petition*	*Voting online on a specific public issue*
Germany								X	
Austria							X	X	X
Belgium									
Bulgaria									
Croatia							X		
Denmark					X	X		NA	
Slovakia									
Slovenia							X	X	
Spain								X	
Estonia						X	X	NA	
Finland						X		NA	X
France					X			X	
Greece									
Netherlands								X	
Hungary									
Ireland								X	
Italy								X	
Portugal				X		X		X	
UK	X	X		X	X			X	
Romania								X	
Sweden								NA	

Note: In the column of 'e-petition', NA means 'Not Applicable'. For more details see Chapter III

5.2 SUBSTANTIVE WAYS OF PROMOTING PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Stephen Coleman and John Gøtze in 'Bowling Together: Online Public Engagement in Policy Deliberation' (2002) argue there is not a 'one-size-fits-all' solution to involve citizens in policy making. The authors present several and different case accounts from online polls to chat rooms, not necessarily as examples of best practice, nor to dwell upon their limitations. This chapter attempts to follow the same purpose. All the cases reported here are innovative and pioneering efforts to use digital technology to invigorate the democratic process and promote public engagement. Some can be considered important attempts to implement either advocacy or deliberative instruments. Ten or twenty years from now much of what is reported here will probably seem terribly primitive and obsolete, but unless we learn from what has been done in the early stages of e-engagement, there is little reason to be sanguine about the future.

Of course, the degree to which policy and decision making is responsive to public input is an important consideration in all public participation instruments, but a more specific concern in this chapter relates to the type of input the public was being asked to supply and what initiatives were designed to achieve.

5.2.1 Online Discussions

Online political discussion, as one of the oldest manifestations of digital democracy, has been the focus of arguably the largest body of research in political communication. However, much of the research on Internet-based political discussion has supported for both the optimists' hopes on the medium's potential to provide a democracy-enriching communication platform (Kelly et al., 2005; Papacharissi, 2004) and the pessimists' fears and worries on its democratic impact (Adamic and Glance, 2005; Davis, 1999; Wilhelm, 1999), suggesting that at least some online spaces are in fact capable of hosting salutary democratic communication (for a more thorough exploration of this question, see Janssen and Kies, 2005). Although it is not our intention to assess the impact of online political discussion, it is worth paying attention to the tools parliaments are offering to citizens to initiate a political discussion and dialogue with them. Two different tools were found: online forums and digital debates, as depicted in Table 5.2.

Looking at the Table 5.2, parliaments are still cautiously exploring the possibility to offer online discussion mechanisms to the public. For instance, online forums were only found in Portugal and the United Kingdom, were the forums are structured around themes designated by the website's managers, without the possibility for citizens to introduce the topic. A second feature promoting online discussion is the 'digital debates' promoted by the House of Commons since 2015- again the public has no power on the topics chosen.

Table 5.2 Summary of online discussion tools

Examples – how, or by what mechanism the public might do this
1. Online citizens/ discussion forum
▪ Portugal There is a permanent forum that allows citizens to discuss online the legislative initiatives or any other matters that the Assembly intends to submit to public discussion. The topics are chosen by the Assembly and during a period of circa 30 days everyone can follow and participate in those debates. ▪ United Kingdom: There are Web forums on the committee's pages whenever the committee decides to open a Web forum to collect public input. Usually they target a very specific audience and they focus on citizen's experience
2. Digital Debates
▪ United Kingdom: Since 2015, there are digital debates between MPs and citizens held on social media (Twitter and Facebook) before a discussion on the same topic is held in Parliament.

This pattern of caution implementation of online discussion features on parliamentary websites (PWs) has already been observed earlier (Coleman et al., 2000; Setälä and Grönlund, 2006). The World e-parliament report of 2008 stressed that the use of online discussion groups was then at a very early stage of adoption in parliaments (IPU, 2008). After almost 20 years, the report of 2016 indicates less than 20% of parliaments are using only discussion forums. In 2006, Portugal was already an exception in the European context. Bernzten et al (2006), stressed that Portugal 'has an open discussion forum structured around four main topics: school materials, rights and obligations of parents associations, education law discussion, and traffic security' (Bernzten et al., 2006: 10).

Discussion forums have been praised as they add value of raising public interest in political issues (Setälä and Grönlund, 2006). Despite their potentials to enhance public interest and deliberation on issues, there are probably good reasons for caution with respect to these kinds of functionalities. Specifically, the quality of the deliberation and the discussion in online forums on PWs is highly questionable. There is much concern that political discussions – particularly on controversial issues – degenerate, with excessive 'flaming' (offensive contributions) and other forms of incivility, militating against more widespread participation (Docter and Dutton, 1998). Therefore, the literature has mixed and even contrary perspectives on this issue, which can, to some extent, be accounted for by substantial differences in institutional design of different online environments, including online discussion forums. As Wright and Street argue 'the democratic possibilities opened up (or closed off) by websites are not a product of the technology as such, but of the ways in which it is constructed, by the way it is designed' (Wright and Street, 2007: 850).

When it comes to online forums design, technical structure, and organization, they take various forms. They can be broad in scope, covering an array of issues and conversation threads, or be more focused on specific issues. They can be asynchronous, meaning that people can choose to participate anytime and from anywhere they have an Internet, or synchronous - online discussion space takes place in real time (chat rooms). Besides the technical architecture, there are differences in the manner in which online discussion spaces are organised, with a number of indicators likely to have an effect on the quality of engagement, including: whether or not participants are required to identify themselves; limits to openness and freedom of speech; the existence and form of moderation; and the extent to which participants are able to set the agenda for debate (Janssen and Kies, 2005).

Both in the UK and Portugal, the content and user comments are managed much like a blog. However, while a blog does not (conventionally) require registration to post, a forum usually does. Users can participate in forums anonymously, but may also share information about themselves in a profile to help other users contextualise their comments. Forum administrators can opt to moderate comments (check suitability) either before or after they are published in the forum space. The difference between UK and Portugal is that the latter provides a permanent online forum.

The UK Parliament has also sought to use online forums to elicit the views of the public during select committee inquiries as an alternative to traditional, written submissions. The adoption of online forums as an integral part of select committee activity has helped broaden

the reach of committee inquiries at Westminster (Hansard Society, 2011a). As advertised in the British parliamentary website, this sometimes happens via Web forums or through their social media channels – which are called 'digital debates' in Table 5.2, and are different in its institutional design and organization. For this reason, the digital debates promoted by the UK parliament will be discussed further in more detail.

The lack of investment in online discussion forums pictured in the analysis might hide unintentionally a more complex reality. Evidence that some parliaments have tried to operate an online forum in the past was found – in some cases they still advertise it on their websites but all the entries are from several years ago, which mean the tool is inactive. For instance, the French National Assembly[62] back in 2010 used to operate a moderated forum 'for open and constructive debate' to 'allow visitors to share ideas and arguments in a reasoned and courteous way'. Even though it is still formally 'online' the feature has not been active for a long period of time.

Experience at the individual-level suggests that the most successful online discussion forums are usually those that are clearly structured around particular issues, are well moderated and facilitated, and are clearly linked to policy formation and decision making (Wright 2006; Ferguson 2008). Price et al. (2002) completed an experiment related to online discussion forums and found that participation in these forums increased the likelihood of voting in the next election, controlling for habitual voting. Habitual voting was positively related to participating in the online forums (Ibid.). Their findings suggest a two-way causal process, but they did not explicitly test a reciprocal effects model.

Finally, another feature promoting online discussion is the *'digital debates'* promoted by the House of Commons since 2015. Despite the common logic of creating a space for political discussion using online tools, digital debates are slightly different from traditional Web forums as described above. Essentially because of two main reasons: its institutional design and its organization. First, the digital debates take place in social media, Facebook or Twitter accounts of the UK parliament. This means this feature is synchronous, i.e. takes place in the real time, contrary to the asynchronous online forums explained above. Second, the responsibility for the discussion moderation lies in MPs.

62 The online forum did not provide two-way interaction with members, but all contributions were passed to the relevant member or rapporteur on an on-going basis. Where the discussion concerns a particular bill, for example, then the information is fed to the member with responsibility for reviewing the bill and often the contributions from the forum are brought together in an Appendix to the relevant committee report (Hansard Society, 2011b).

The process is as follows: a topic for discussion is chosen - the digital debate occurs before the actual debate is held in the chamber. The debate is advertised in the parliamentary website as well in social media and participants receive information about the nature of these debates. One MP is responsible for managing the debate on social media and answer citizens' inputs, which lasts one hour. Debates on Twitter are recorded in a Storify summary after the event, while Facebook debates remain available on the event page. A summary of comments is shared with MPs taking part in the debate. In sum, the main difference lies in the fact the they enable members of the public to share their views directly with the MP(s) initiating and managing the debate (Uberoi, 2017).

Following the information provided in the official reports and statistics of the House of Commons, these debates are 'unlikely to result in legislative changes' and in the future 'the parliament aims to substantially expand the number of digital debates in the future' (Uberoi, 2017: 26). Between June 2015 and January 2018, thirty-two digital debates took place on social media. They started taking place on the parliaments' official twitter account, and more recently, are also ocurring on parliament's Facebook page. Some of the debates are a partnership with organisations and sometimes they take place on online forums or on the organization's Facebook page.

The previous analysis, on Chapter IV, has shown that many other parliaments have also social media platforms. However, there is no evidence supporting they are using social media to initiate an online discussion with their public – which does not mean it is (or can) happening. Besides, reports have consistently pointed out that parliaments are not using social media to foster meaningful interaction and discussion with the public (Griffith and Leston-Bandeira, 2012).

5.2.3 Crowdsourcing and the Wisdom of Crowds

Crowdsourcing is a combination of 'crowd' and 'outsourcing', which refers to attempts to solve problems and complete tasks by drawing upon the distributed knowledge and expertise of people—the so-called 'wisdom of the crowd'—beyond the confines and cramped optics of bureaucratic organizations (Brabham 2008). Initially employed by corporations in the private sector, crowdsourcing has been discussed more recently as a potential new means of public engagement into decision making processes to enable collaborative democracy (Brabham, 2008, 2009; Hilgers and Ihl, 2010; Koch et al., 2011; Moss and Coleman, 2014).

Crowdsourcing follows an 'ask the audience' approach, which may take different shapes. Despite their differences in design and organization, the analysis shows three crowdsourcing activities among parliaments in this study (Table 5.3). From online polls and surveys, to tools enabling the crowdsourcing of legislative activity, to opportunities to submit evidence to a committee. Crowdsourcing activities might include the analysis or summarizing of legislation, in which citizens or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or other civil society groups may participate through Web forms or other ICT tools for that purpose. Crowdsourcing can also be deployed to monitor the legislature and legislative production of the parliament (Michener, 2011).

Table 5.3 reports the different mechanisms through which parliaments are experimenting some type of crowdsourcing activities. First, let us start with the tools in place in Austria, Croatia and Slovenia, which allow citizens to *comment on bills drafts*.

Since September 2017, Austrian citizens with 16 or more years can submit comments (up to 2,500 characters) on ministerial drafts (legislative proposals by the ministries) via the website. In addition, citizens can support/agree with the comments already made and published online. This electronic participatory tool is called extended assessment procedure and it was created by the Resolution of the National Council of 16 May 2017 (200/E). An assessment procedure for a bill usually takes place before the bill is introduced in the National Council (i.e. before the parliamentary procedure). If such is already in place, a committee may decide to seek opinions on a bill. In the new extended appraisal procedure, it is also possible for bodies or persons to submit statements to legislative proposals that are not direct addressees of an invitation to an appraisal. There is also the possibility to support comments already received on a draft bill on Parliament's website.

In Croatia and Slovenia, the procedure is similar. There is an online consultation period (one month in Croatia and up to two months on Slovenia) and during this period citizens can actively participate in the process. The process in Slovenia is possible in the stage of 'public debate' on the online sub-portal eDemocracy (it is inside the national e-government portal). The process starts similarly with the online publication of the draft and then a public consultation takes place during 30 to 60 days. Each authority in charge of the preparation of a regulation must publish the prepared text of the regulation online, for at least 30 days. During this period, the draftsperson still receives opinions on the regulation by other ministries or government agencies. However, in Croatia the process is less digital and innovative, in the

sense that the parliament publishes the bill draft under discussion in the parliament along with a word form on which everyone can fill and introduce their comments and opinions.

In Europe these tools of legislative crowdsourcing, i.e. the possibility to comment the bills while they are being discussed in the parliament, are a complete democratic innovation. Most of the known cases are in Latin American, such as the Chilean state, the Peruvian congress, and the Brazilian chamber of Deputies. Until recently, these were the cases at the legislature level known to allow the public to submit their views about bills under consideration through an e-Consultation scheme, online forum or e-democracy platform (Faria and Rehbein, 2016; Hansard Society, 2011b). In fact, the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies Web portal 'e-Democracia' is the most recognized experience of online participatory tool of crowdsourcing. The Web portal has been running since 2009. This is a way for citizens to participate directly in the legislative process and ask members questions during live public hearings and discussion forums. The portal now includes the Wikilegis tool, which allows citizens to track and comment on pending legislation on an article-by-article basis. They can also suggest changes and add new text to draft legislation. This is an example of how parliaments can break down the barriers between citizens and their representatives, giving a sense that lawmakers, legislative consultants, and citizens, all have equal opportunities to propose solutions to policy problems (IPU, 2016). However, as Andrea Perna (2010) reports, the main problem with most of the Latin American experiments is precisely their failure to have any repercussions on the actual legislative processes.

Second, a more classical and traditional way of crowdsourcing is to simply ask the public to *submit evidence to an inquiry*. Even though this might be a traditional channel used by parliaments of pre-legislative scrutiny, it shares the same logic of the more interactive and modern tools promoting crowdsourcing nowadays. The public is able to submit evidence, which sometimes could be experiential testimony, or the submission and discussion of evidence for consideration by a committee of MPs and peers. In France this feature was designed for impact studies and not for legislation, which are secondary documents that accompanies all the bills submitted to the National Assembly.

Finally, a third way to crowdsource is to invite the public to take an *online survey or poll*. Random or chosen representative samples can be used. There are many variants. For instance, in deliberative polling, participants have the opportunity to learn about and discuss the issue, questioning experts, so they can make informed and thought through judgements. A representative sample meet over a few days, with polls taken at the beginning and at the end of

the event. This was not the case found in the analysis. Only the UK parliament seems to use online surveys, which are specifically linked to the work of the committees. For some cases and issues, parliamentary committees have a Web survey tool to gather feedback from the public. Compared to the online discussion forums, Web surveys provide much more structured information, which in theory would favour parliamentary administrations. This even greater lack of investment in these tools does not mean parliaments have not tried out and implemented opinion polls or online surveys in the past for a specific topic or issue that was in the agenda in the past. In fact, online surveys and polls might serve specific and timely needs, which might explain the scarcity found in the cases analysed here.

Table 5.3 Summary of online crowdsourcing tools

Examples – how, or by what mechanism the public might do this
1.Commenting bills drafts
▪ Austria Since 2017, citizens may comment ministerial drafts during an open revision period in the website of the Parliament. ▪ Croatia There is an online consultation period for bills drafts (circa one month). The bill draft is published online along with a word form for those interested in commenting the draft ▪ Slovenia There is a period of 30-60 days of online public consultation. Citizens can actively participate in the process of drafting the regulation by submitting proposals, opinions, and comments, to the published draft on the portal 'e-democracy'.
2.Submit online evidence to an inquiry
▪ Denmark The parliament gives the opportunity to submit online evidence (up to 3 documents) to the Committees. ▪ United Kingdom: The House of Commons has given certain Public Bill Committees the power to receive written submissions - known as memoranda - from outside organisations and individuals. ▪ France Citizens can read and submit observations to the impact studies, a document that accompanies all bills submitted in the first place to the National Assembly. A list of impact studies on which contributions are currently open is available on the website.
3.Online surveys/opinion polls
▪ United Kingdom For some topics and some committees there is the opportunity to fill an online survey. E.g. In 2013 the Defence Committee invited military Service personnel and their families to take part in an on-line forum which was set up to hear the service personal views on the education for Service children and the education of Armed Forces personnel

5.2.3 E-Petitions and other Single-Click Citizenship tools

Single-click models of citizenship is an expression used by Giles Moss and Stephen Coleman (2014) to refer to e-petitioning. For the authors, e-petitions and similar platforms reflect a limited model of single-click citizenship by opposition to broader processes of public deliberation. Both e-petitions and collective citizens initiatives would fall into this categorization. Besides these, the analysis also unveiled a new procedure taking place in Austria which shares the same logic of the models of single-click Citizenship tolls, and for that reason, will be included in this category.

Table 5.4 shows three different single-click citizenship platforms. Although with different structures and forms of organization, these three platforms may contribute to realizing democratic outcomes by allowing citizens to raise new perspectives, put issues on the agenda, and by stimulating public engagement (Moss and Coleman, 2014). However, some scholars remain sceptical of the value of such initiatives in isolation. The problem is that democratic communication is confined to individualistic inputs, based on simple 'yes' or 'no' responses, without there being scope for citizens to contest, refine, or combine one another's ideas. There are some differences among the systems worth to mention. Some of them allow for greater inputs than only 'yes' or 'no' responses or 'upvotes' or 'downvotes'. Some allow for comments and have spaces for discussion. As to whether this might help to promote greater deliberative reflection, it could be argued that even if citizens are not actively debating the pros and cons of petition proposals, some of them may be engaging in what Goodin (2000) has called 'internal deliberation': following the subsequent parliamentary debate and weighing up the arguments expressed in their own minds.

Starting with e-petitions and citizens initiatives, the main difference between them rests in the underlying legal basis of these instruments and has more to do with the competences of different institutions. Thus, a petition commonly has the form of a complaint, while an initiative proposes a new piece of legislation; however, it is not inconceivable that petitioning the parliaments can, although indirectly, result in setting an agenda for new legislation as well. In e-participation lingo even more, so do online citizens' initiatives fall neatly into the category of e- petitioning — namely as 'public e-petitions with additional participatory elements' (Lindner and Riehm, 2009) such as an opportunity to support it with an electronically submitted signature.

Table 5.4 shows how different e-petitions systems can be. From less interactive and automated to more complete and electronic systems. Given the diversity of systems, elements, and characteristics, that defines an e-petition system, the definition provided by Bohle and Riehm (2013) was used to differentiate qualitatively the systems among European parliaments[63]. Returning to the above debate about the potential for these single-click citizenship models, it is worthy to mention that there are four parliaments providing a sophisticated electronic process: Germany, Austria, UK and Ireland. However, only the e-petition system in Germany allows for more than a simple 'yes' or 'no' response. The system gives citizens the possibility to discuss the petition in question, to contest, refine, or combine one another's ideas.

The second participatory tool depicted in Table 5.4 is *online collective appeals/citizens' initiatives* found in Finland, Denmark, Portugal and Estonia[64]. Along with referendums, citizens' initiatives are a main institutional mechanism for the public to participate in the political decision making process directly. Citizens' initiatives are not a particularly new form of democratic innovation - they have been in place in Switzerland since 1891. The procedural requirements for organizing initiatives, like the number of signatures required, and name collecting periods, are varied. In the sample of parliaments analysed in this thesis, there are four parliaments that have adopted these participatory tools, supported by ICT, which are worth paying attention.

First, Finland was the first Nordic country that has adopted citizens' initiatives at the national level (2012). A unique feature of its institutional design is that it permits e-collection for citizens' initiatives, which gives an exceptional example along with the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) - the first tool for transnational democratic participation (Seo, 2017). Moving to Portugal, it is worth mentioning that the possibility to present a citizen's initiative is consecrated in the Portuguese Constitution since 1997; however, the procedural requirements have changed over time. For instance, the signatures threshold decreased from 35 000 signatures to 20 000 signatures in 2016, and in 2018 an electronic platform was developed to

63 For more details on the conceptualization and operationalization of e-petition systems see Chapter III.

64 Austria has a mechanism of citizens initiatives; however, the process is not entirely online. Therefore, it was not considered in this measure. Austrian citizens can submit a parliamentary citizens initiative to the National Council, the proposal must be written and presented to the parliament board. To deliver the proposal, the proponent must firstly schedule an interview with the parliamentary board and prove their residency. After that, citizens may give their electronic consent to the initiative on the parliament' website, which only has an informational purpose for the National Council deliberations.

offer citizens an easier way to submit their initiatives. The latest reform on this matter was planned by the Danish parliament which has introduced a new tool for direct democracy. The new tool enables Danish citizens to put an item of interest on the parliamentary agenda, if 50.000 people support it. The speaker of the house considers this tool as 'a whole new form of civic engagement, which gives democracy an extra dimension. It will be exciting to see the submitted proposals, and follow how many supporters each proposal receives' – as one can read in the parliamentary website. Finally, Estonia offers a more accessible participatory tool requiring only 1000 signatures in order to citizens to submit their proposals, which can be suggestions for changing a present regulation or for organizing the society better. Compared to the previous ones, the institutional threshold is much lower which potentially determine not just the extent of the use of initiatives but also the types of associations and organizations which take advantage of the citizens' initiative (Setälä and Schiller, 2012).

Although there are differences among these tools, all of them constitute a form of 'agenda initiatives', which means they allow citizens to bring their agenda to representative bodies without binding process of popular vote. While, full-scale initiatives usually have stringent requirements while agenda initiatives have relatively lower thresholds.

Finally, the third single-click citizenship tool found in the analysis is a recent instrument in Austria, already mentioned and developed in the crowdsourcing section (above). Since 2017 Austrian citizens have the opportunity to submit comments (up to 2,500 characters) on ministerial drafts (legislative proposals by the ministries) via the website and upvote or downvote on the ministerial drafts. Even though this tool allows citizens to submit comments to the drafts, it also shares the same logic of the models of single-click Citizenship tolls, since it allows for an upvote or downvote. A brief analysis of the current ministerial drafts published on the website confirms this tool is mostly used as the same logic of single-click citizenship tool – most people seems to prefer to vote rather to comment. This will be further developed along the case study chapter on the Austrian Parliament.

Table 5.4 Summary of innovative practices of parliamentary engagement with the public

Examples – how, or by what mechanism the public might do this
E-Petitions
▪ Spain, Romania In Spain the submission is still through paper – it must be sent to the parliamentary services. While, in Romania the process is still rudimental, but submission can be done through a Web form on the website ▪ France, Italy In France, the website publishes the petitions, the decisions related to a given petition, and additional information on the Web, but there is no online form to send the petition. While in Italy, petitions can be sent electronically through e-mail; a list of petitions is published but without information on the decisions. ▪ Netherlands, Slovenia, Portugal In these countries, the e-petition system is almost completely electronic, unless for the involvement of the public. None of the systems allows the public to sign or discuss the petitions published on the website. ▪ Germany, Austria, UK, Ireland The system is completely (or almost) electronic (the submission is electronic trough Web forms or via e-mail; publication of petitions online; interaction between the petitions and the petition body, and in some cases the involvement of the public online is possible – by signing or/and discussing the petitions online)
Online collective appeals/Citizens Initiatives
▪ Finland From March 2012, the Constitution of Finland made it possible to allow for a citizens' initiative to the Parliament of Finland. The initiative must achieve 50 000 signatures to get to be discussed in parliament. It is possible to see the list with all the proposals submitted on the website. ▪ Estonia Citizens can submit online a collective appeal (it is necessary to collect at least 1000 letters of citizens support) to suggest a draft, initiate a debate on a national issue, to suggest a public hearing, and so on. ▪ Denmark

Recently (January of 2018), a system was created whereby citizens who have the right to vote for the Folketing (up to 50 000) may submit proposals for subsequent consideration as resolutions in the Folketing, enabling other persons who fulfil the same condition to express their support for such proposals
▪ Portugal A group of 20,000 citizens may submit a citizens' legislative initiative. The Portuguese parliament provides an electronic platform that allows the submission of the legislative initiative and the collection of the signatures.
Voting online on legislation
▪ Austria Since 2017 Austrian citizens with 16 or more years have the opportunity to upvote or downvote on ministerial drafts (legislative proposals by the ministries) via the website.

5.3 SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

The main aim of this chapter is to complement the quantitative results of the comparative website analysis by presenting a brief examination of the qualitative aspects of the consultative and participatory forms of engagement found in the 21 European parliaments in the study. Therefore, this chapter has devoted time to understand the different tools and methods taking place in parliaments to promote the participation and consultation of their citizens. Why a special focus on this dimension of e-engagement supply? Because, along the spectrum of public engagement, the final category is where more substantive engagement occurs. Furthermore, it is also in this category that tools and features are more complex and intricate, and for that reason, it is important to go beyond the quantitative assessment already undergone.

Building a toolkit for online public engagement requires an understanding of how technology can help and hinder public engagement (Coleman and Gøtze, 2002). This is essential for managing expectations of the technology and evaluating results. Institutions and political actors need to ask what is it they want to achieve, and how to use technology to achieve these goals. Besides, they also need to think about the institutional design, structure and organization. As this chapter has demonstrated, the success of any technological tool used to engage with the public depends a lot on the structure on which it lies. There are many

possibilities, as shown previously: various shapes and structures; numerous formats and different forms to organize it. In several cases, the final decision is also a matter of resources, financial and human (Leston-Bandeira, 2007). Having the right team to administrate and manage these tools, and the volume of information received, is extremely important. Ultimately, this will influence the degree to which policy and decision making is responsive to publics input through these tools.

The chapter has leaned over the few examples of Internet being used to substantively involve citizens in policy deliberation and consultation. Some of the examples found are of an experimental nature or are still in its infancy. Most of parliaments have not yet implemented activities and tools to truly engage with their citizens. Furthermore, almost all of the cases found are discouraged by the same two well-known problems: i) too few people know about them and ii) parliaments fail to integrate them into the policy process or respond to them effectively. Even though it does not dive into to the demand side (the public), the analysis has revealed that, in many cases, few people know about these tools, which ultimately results in low levels of participation. For instance, the online forum developed by the Portuguese parliament has seen little participation. Additionally, in many cases, there were no clear indications as to the extent to which citizens' inputs were taken into account. For instance, the Austrian parliament is experimenting with a crowdsourcing instrument by collecting both comments and votes for ministerial drafts on its parliamentary website; however, even though the procedure is explained to the public, it is not clear how these inputs are then integrated into the decision-making process.

Of the techniques being experimented with, e-petition is undoubtedly the most widespread. This is to be expected, given it is a democratic instrument used by many parliaments even before by the technological development. Thus, parliaments 'only' had to convert a conventional form of participation to the digital world. This is not simple, of course, and entails several challenges and decisions to make; and, as shown earlier, there are many variants. The process can be more or less interactive, with exchanging ideas for instance or quite simple and not interactive at all. Given its long tradition and implementation over the years in representative democracies, the e-petition is considered by now to be the most developed, matured and institutionalized technological participatory procedure nowadays (Tibúrcio, 2015). Nevertheless, this reveals parliaments are using ICTs to digitally transform the participatory instruments already offered to citizens, such as petitions. This transformation process should not be underestimated of course, the Internet has made the once laborious

process of organizing, publicizing, and submitting, petitions much easier, but it suggests parliaments are conservative and approach innovation cautiously and timidly. Besides, it would be a mistake to limit the Internet's democratic role to single-click and individualistic inputs (Moss and Coleman, 2014). As this chapter showed, what is missing is a systemic attempt to enhance the limited model of single-click citizenship with broader processes and instruments promoting substantive public engagement in new and innovative ways.

Finally, an additional important point must be noted. The tools and procedures presented above are not in any way mutually exclusive. On the contrary, one can imagine - and the analysis suggests it - that overlapping and mutually reinforcing online public engagement combinations are possible.

Still, one question remains unanswered. This chapter is called 'substantive forms of public engagement', but are parliaments really engaging their citizens substantively? After a brief study of the qualitative aspects of different forms of public engagement analysed, it is not possible to entirely asses if they are in fact engaging the public, or the degree to which policy and decision making is responsive to public input through these instruments. Some opportunities are in place and some of them have the potential to engage the public in the decision making process. The extent they can do it can also differ, from more advocacy/participatory forms to more direct/deliberative models. Regardless of their aim or purpose, some of these instruments are more well designed, structured and organized than others, which ultimately will partially define their success in engaging the public.

Additionally, increasingly nowadays there is 'a strong case for using field study methods to observe and analyse eParticipation tools being used in community group settings and public places' (Macintouch and Whyte, 2008). In the future, a focus on behaviour in context, as well as views expressed in individual discussions, is required for a fuller understanding of the appropriateness of the technology and activities being offered by parliaments. This would complement the knowledge we can collect by evaluating and measuring parliaments' (as well other actors) supply of e-engagement activities.

PART THREE

GOING BEYOND DESCRIPTIVE RESULTS

CHAPTER VI

EXPLAINING E-ENGAGEMENT SUPPLY: A FUZZY-SET ANALYSIS

In the previous chapters, the level of online engagement was defined and measured in 21 European countries. The descriptive analysis showed differences among parliaments in the way they choose to invest in ICTs to engage with the public. Many questions were left unanswered on which factors explain those differences. Thus, this chapter follows an explorative approach to discover the combinations of conditions that led to parliaments' supply of e-engagement tools and activities. The analysis will be focused on the impact of pulling factors, i.e. driving forces that emerge within institutions, such as their bureaucratic features and through administrative and political practices, and pushing factors, i.e. contextual forces, such as the technological environment that promote and facilitate the advances of technology. To assess which conditions led to parliaments' different levels of e-engagement supply, a fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (QCA), also known as fuzzy-set QCA or fsQCA is applied. While developed initially by Ragin (1987; 2000), a growing number of scholars have contributed to further elaboration of these techniques. In essence, QCA is a family of comparative techniques that aim to explain macro-social phenomena in a parsimonious way while working with small to medium-size data sets (Vink and Vliet, 2007).

The chapter is organized in four main sections. First, section 6.1 explains the underlying reasons for employing a QCA in this thesis. Next, section 6.2 presents the fuzzy-set approach, the causal conditions (and expectations) included in the analysis, and the assignment of the fuzzy membership scores to both the dependent and independent variables – the outcome and causal conditions, in QCA terminology. Section 6.3 presents the results of the fsQCA. Finally, section 6.4 presents a summary of the conclusions achieved in this chapter.

6.1 WHY (FUZZY-SET) QCA?

The choice of employing a fsQCA in this thesis is due to both theoretical and empirical reasons. Theoretically, the thesis argues that parliaments' strategies of online public engagement at the organizational level may be defined as a reaction to what is happening in their environment and to contextual pressures (institutional approach), but it may also be defined as a matter of its agency, assuming organizations have control (agency) regarding its future and decisions (rational choice approach). Thus, the outlined theoretical expectations are sensitive for each case analysed, rather than assuming unit homogeneity. To account for each case's unique characteristics, QCA offers itself an excellent technique (Hall, 2003). Empirically, the advantage of using QCA is that it allows the analysis of a medium-N dataset (about 15 to 50 cases), which would not be possible via traditional regression analysis (Vis, 2012). QCA allows for meaningful inferential analysis with perhaps a tenth of the cases needed to employ traditional quantitative statistics. In this study, the cases in the sample would be too small to account for a degree of freedom in regression analysis and would be too large to examine via one-by-one case studies.

Additionally, this method offers several methodological advantages. First, it is better-suited than regression for exploring 'conjunctural causation' – situations in which variables have an impact only in combination with a high or low degree of one or more other factors, which may be the case for parliaments' supply of public engagement activities given the previous research results. This means that different constellations of factors may lead to the same result. In regression analysis, this is usually assessed via interaction terms. However, a small N limits the number of interactions terms that can be included in a regression model. Besides, the difficulty of interpreting interaction terms with more than two variables makes modelling complex interactions problematic. (Epstein et al, 2008). Hence, QCA techniques strive to achieve some form of 'short' (parsimonious) explanation of a certain phenomenon of interest, while still providing an appropriate allowance for causal complexity.

Second, QCA allows us to identify multiple pathways to an outcome. Correlational techniques such as regression treat the presence of an outcome (dependent variable) without a given cause (independent variable) as negative evidence for the strength of that causal explanation. Thus, a factor that has an impact in a subset of cases – but only a subset – tends to become obscured in regression results with deflated coefficients and inflated variance. In

contrast, QCA can reveal causal patterns that differ across subsets of cases. This method thereby allows us to examine datasets with more complex causal narratives than are generally possible with correlational techniques (Ragin, 2008).

Third, whereas regression is useful for examining tendential relationships – the general tendency of a particular factor to influence an outcome of interest – QCA helps explore a different kind of relationship: causal sufficiency (Vis, 2012). QCA assesses sufficiency via the logic of set-theoretic relations. Set theory is inherent (though often implicit rather than explicit) in much of social science (Ragin, 2000). Sets are simply conceptual categories like 'generous government benefits' or 'low-income inequality' (Epstein et al, 2008). Much social science concerns itself with the relative membership of cases in such categories, the theoretical validity of a set designation, or the ways one set might subsume another. The set-subset ordering of social phenomena is key to understand causal sufficiency. A causal factor is considered sufficient when its presence always (or nearly always) 'produces' a particular outcome (Epstein et al, 2008). For instance, having 'financial resources' is generally a sufficient condition for institutions to adapt to new technologies and 'go online'. But it is not the only way to adapt to new technologies, one could also have pressures or incentives from the context where they operate to achieve the same outcome. In set-theoretic terms, the cause (financial resources) is a subset of the outcome (institutions' digital presence): it always produces the outcome, but it is not the only pathway to it. Because sufficient causes are always subsets of the outcomes they 'produce,' discerning on subset relations will point to potentially sufficient causal pathways.

In general, QCA assumes not only that the research environment of political science is extremely rich (too many variables, not enough cases), but also that the connections between variables are better described in terms of multiple and conjunctural causation (Ragin, 2000). These considerations are specifically challenging for studies involving a small to a medium number of cases where, on the one hand, the standard qualitative method for comparison is currently judged to be too unsophisticated, and on the other hand, mainstream statistics provide little reliability and robustness (Hall, 2003). Therefore, its potential for systematic cross-case comparison is especially helpful for studies involving small and medium-N data sets because it allows for meaningful inferential analysis with perhaps a tenth of the cases needed to employ traditional quantitative statistics.

By using QCA, the impact of a few variables on the parliaments' supply level of e-engagement is going to be tested.However, before the analysis it is essential to explain the principles of the fuzzy-set approach.

6.2 FUZZY-SET-APPROACH

The empirical analysis is carried out using the fuzzy-set approach, a qualitative comparative method developed by Charles C. Ragin. The reason for choosing the fuzzy-set approach is that it works particularly well in studies where the nature of data is such that it would be problematic simply to rely on conventional sets indicating that an object is either in or out (presence/absence) of a set (a crisp set). Instead of merely stating in a dichotomous fashion that a certain condition is either present or absent (for example, a parliament is either a large or small)[65], the 'fuzzy set, by contrast, permits membership in the interval between 0 and 1 while retaining the two qualitative states of full membership and full non-membership' (Ragin, 2008: 6). Fuzzy sets are especially powerful because they allow to calibrate partial membership in sets using values in the interval between [0] (nonmembership) and [1] (full membership). Therefore, it is the researcher' job to 'specify procedures for assigning fuzzy membership scores to cases, and these procedures must be both open and explicit so that they can be evaluated by other scholars' (Ibid). In addition to the maximum and minimum values of 1 and 0, the fuzzy set also distinguishes between objects that are 'more in' versus 'more out' by using the 'crossover' point of 0.5.

Depending on the nature of the data available, fuzzy membership scores were assigned to the variables. Assigning the fuzzy membership scores forms the crucial stage in the fuzzy-set analysis. While the assignment process is often quite straightforward, sometimes the nature of the data is such that the task is very demanding. For example, in this study, this applies to trying to establish the parliaments' human and financial capacity. Measuring the parliamentary capacity is a notoriously difficult exercise. Besides, considering the scarcity of previous comparative studies on this topic, the lack of available and up to date data along with the absence of good cross-national indicators of parliaments' capacity made the assignment of scores very difficult and can certainly be challenged. This is indeed it is important to be explicit about the choices made, which will be presented further in this chapter.

After assigning the fuzzy membership scores to both the outcome and causal conditions, the fuzzy-set approach attends to causal complexity by identifying necessary and sufficient conditions. A necessary cause, unlike the sufficient condition, must be always present for the

[65] This is called the crisp sets, which forces cases to be either in or out of a set.

outcome in question to occur – that is, all instances of the outcome should be preceded by the cause or exhibit the cause in some way. If it can be shown that all instances of the outcome share the same antecedent condition, then the researcher has established that the antecedent condition may be necessary for the outcome. The key question is, are there any cases where the outcome is present, but the cause is absent? If the answer is yes, then the test of necessity fails. To assess the sufficiency of a cause, the researcher must determine whether the cause in question always produces the outcome in question – that is, do cases where the cause is present also produce the outcome? (Ragin, 2008). It is important to pay attention to the difference between necessary and sufficient conditions. A cause can be necessary without being sufficient. In such cases, other variables are needed. Sufficiency implies that a certain combination of causes can produce the outcome, but there may also be other combinations that produce the same result (Schneider and Wagemann, 2012).

6.2.1 Causal Conditions

Largely speaking, in the literature considering how political institutions evolve towards a more digital presence (e.g. e-government) there are two major driven forces: systemic and contextual pushing forces (macro-level) and organizational pulling forces (meso-level). The expectation is that the same analytical framework can be used to understand and explain the causal conditions that led to parliaments' different levels (and strategies) of e-engagement supply.

The systematic factors refer to driving forces that emerge from the macro level, i.e. the political, technological, economic and social context where parliaments operate. This might include technological and societal pushing forces that promote and facilitate the advances of technology. The organizational factors refer to the characteristics and features of parliaments that can encourage or constrain parliaments to engage with digital technologies. This means there are driving forces within the parliamentary bodies, such resources that can explain parliaments' evolution towards a more digital and engaging online presence. Therefore, it seems fruitful to distinguish between contextual and organizational causal conditions, which will be explained accordingly in the remainder of this chapter. This means, that more or less explicitly this analysis follows the logic of a multi-level explanation (Coleman, 1994) since the causal model contemplates both factors that facilitate the supply of e-engagement and those that stimulate the demand for e-engagement in a country.

6.2.1.1 Systematic and contextual factors

Although the development of theory has been relatively sparse in the comparatively young field of e-parliament, there are broad systematic and contextual factors that can be singled out: the influence of technological factors, namely citizens technology literacy or Internet rate penetration; and also the role of citizens' attitudes towards the political system, most prominently their trust or distrust in political institutions. The inclusion of these factors in the analysis follows the sociological institutionalist premise that institutions respond to the influences and pressures exerted on them by their social, political and economic environments (Suchman, 1995). Parliaments might respond to the influences and pressures exerted on them by their social environments, which in turn, limits the organizations' agency (Suchman, 1995). Following the sociological institutional approach, it is possible to assume that parliaments will improve their online public engagement policy when they operate in a context that exerts pressure or encourages them to do so.

Others contextual and structural factors have been identified in the literature but will not be included in the analysis for the following reasons. For instance, in earlier research, the level of democracy was considered an explanatory factor (Norris, 2001). This perspective argued the democratic political systems are more prone to promote e-participation than authoritarian regimes, which seek to suppress political and civil freedoms. However, since in this study we are dealing with only democratic countries, assessing this argument is no longer relevant. Similarly, Leston-Bandeira (2007: 658) have highlighted the difference 'whether an institution is older or newer' as 'crucial to understand the different ways through which the Internet and other ICT are impacting on parliaments'. This argument stresses that old and new political organizations integrate differently modes of political engagement in their everyday activities (Vaccari, 2008). The problem with this argument is two-fold. First, to the best of our knowledge, until now it lacks empirical support. Second, and more important, theoretically it is possible to argue at one hand that in established democracies, parliaments are more developed and better equipped to perform their functions, including engaging with citizens, than in new democracies (Schmidt 1999) and on the other hand, parliaments in new democracies will take less time to adjust to the new technological environment, since they emerged in a more recent technological context when comparing to older democracies which were developed at a time when the printed mass media were the dominant communication channels between leaders and citizens (Klinger 2013). Additionally, the electoral system is also

considered to be, at least theoretically, a key variable impacting the relationship between parliament and citizens and the style of this relationship (Leston-Bandeira, 2007). However, recent literature on parliamentary websites (PWs) reports none systematic differences between proportional and disproportional electoral systems (Setälä and Grönlund, 2006; Kittilson and Schwindt-Bayer 2010; Joshi and Rosenfield, 2013).

Given the lack of empirical basis behind these factors, an exploratory analysis of QCA was done including them. The analysis confirmed they are not significant, however. For this reason, and for parsimony, they are not included in the analysis presented in this chapter. The lack of clear theoretical arguments and the need to have a parsimonious model, i.e. with few conditions, are sufficient reasons for not including these variables.

Technological environment: citizens' digital expertise and skills

Research on e-politics has mostly focused on technological explanations. The technological perspective argues that technological development shapes society just as much as society shapes technologies. Therefore, the extent of technology diffusion per se influences the pace, spread, and impact on political institutions (Norris, 2001a). This perspective believes that access to new technologies is a prerequisite for bringing its transformative potential to bear on democratic processes (Atondo, 2017). This framework assumes that rates of technological diffusion, such as the proportion of the population online, influence institutions in the virtual political system, such as parties, parliaments, government departments and interest groups (Norris, 2001a). Increasing levels of educated and digitally skilled individuals in society means more citizens become informed and knowledgeable (Mälkiä et al., 2004), which create the necessary conditions to strong citizen pressures to push the parliament to adopt popular policies. For instance, citizens may pressure their parliaments to adopt applications and policies that have been adopted in other countries.

The literature on the 'Cyber-Revolution' has pointed out that the diffusion of computers to home and office, the intensity of their use by a population that is becoming increasingly e-literate and capable and the filling of the so-called 'digital divide' between generations and socio-economic categories will inexorably lead to e-democracy. Therefore, the 'development of websites for parliaments and parties is an obvious intervening step in this process' (Trechsel, 2003: 31). In many countries, however, there are still areas without Internet access and also huge sectors of the population that do not have the technical skills for Web use (the digitally

illiterate) (Atondo, 2017). This leads one to ask: does the digital divide still constitute an impediment? Griffith and Leston-Bandeira (2012) still consider the digital divide as an impediment. Their study demonstrates that many of the current gaps in the availability of parliamentary information, in particular concerning non-static information relating to legislative, oversight and budgetary activities are due to the digital divide. The authors' study shows a strong digital divide between the parliaments in higher-income countries and those in lower-income levels, corroborating Norris' theory from almost two decades ago (Norris 2001). This has direct consequences on what parliaments can achieve through their websites by becoming more open, accountable, and transparent institutions, which in turn affects the extent of the relationship between parliament and citizens (Ibid). However, there are contradictory findings regarding the impact of the digital divide. In their study of the websites of European parliaments, Trechsel et al. (2000) report that an 'interesting non-finding is the fact that the digital divide does not appear to have any impact whatsoever'. This means that ICT development does not seem to have any effect on how European parliaments' use ICT to develop their functions.

Contrary to previous research, the technological explanation will be tested by using micro-level data, namely the digital competences and skills of individuals rather than macro-level data. Given the fact that in developed countries, population Internet access availability is not as decisive as people digital skills, which are far more important (and better) representations of the digital divide (Dewan, 2005). This will be further developed in this chapter. Additionally, considering the contradictory results found in the literature, more interdisciplinary research is required since digital divide and technological advances, in general, might or might not contribute, shape and influence the virtual political system. Nevertheless, if there is any substance to the argument that the technological diffusion and modernization influence institutions in the virtual political system, one can expect to find that parliaments where only a minority of citizens have access to the Internet and the necessary digital skills to engage with institutions online may have weaker incentives to invest in their online presence than those in contexts where most citizens can, at least theoretically, access their online ventures. As a result, uneven technologically skilled societies in different countries may be conducive to cross-country inequalities in the supply side of digital politics (Vaccari, 2008).

Societal environment: citizens' political distrust

From the normative perspective of democratic theory, disenchantment with politics and parliaments could provide a powerful incentive for countries to rethink their parliaments' digital strategies (Theiner et al., 2018). Such disillusionment has translated into declining citizen participation in political affairs, partly 'caused by a lack of public confidence and trust in policymakers' (IPU, 2008: 125). There is a growing concern in many legislatures that unless effective channels of communication are established between the institution and their citizens, there could be a risk of further erosion of public's trust in the legislative body (Ibid). In this perspective, some case studies have shown that some parliaments are publicizing information online to improve their reputation, build a better public image for the institution and strengthening parliament's legitimacy (Fox, 2009; Bernardes and Leston-Bandeira, 2016). Besides, countries with especially low levels of trust in parliament make use of the most social media applications (see Gabriel, 2008).

Many studies conducted since the 1990s highlight the potential of ICTs as tools for social engagement (Carman, 2009; Coleman et al., 1999; Dai, 2007; Lilleker and Jackson, 2009) and, as consequence, as a way to mitigate the issue of low trust and negative image of legislative institutions (Leston-Bandeira, 2012a; Walker, 2012). While the use of interactive technologies alone is not enough to rebuild political trust, it may be an important instrument for addressing this problem (IPU, 2008). It could be argued that legislative institutions could use digital tools in an attempt to improve public confidence, just as parliamentarians could use them for more direct contact with citizens, without having to rely on mass communication media (Bernardes and Leston-Bandeira, 2016). Even in cases where individual MPs are not necessarily making effective use of digital tools, the parliamentary institution may take upon itself to compensate for this and present a complex set of engaging tools. However, the offer of these tools does not lead to the actual use of the tools by MPs though. Besides, in many cases, one could argue that if anything, the availability of these tools, with low levels of usage, could lead to a reinforcement of poor levels of trust.

While research in comparative politics and political culture has focused on the role and benefits of political trust, it has largely neglected political distrust, which has remained the object of much confusion and scholarly disagreement (Bertsou, 2019). Nevertheless, this analysis follows the literature in assuming that political (dis)trust indicators reflect a broader attitude toward political institutions (Schneider, 2016). Thus, the main argument is that

citizens' evaluations of the political system (Almond and Verba, 1963; Norris, 1999, 2011) define the demand side of political communication (Kluver, 2005), which may shape and influence the supply side of e-politics. Therefore, it is possible to expect to find that high levels of citizens' political distrust encourage parliaments to invest in their online presence to mitigate it.

6.2.1.2 Organizational factors

Besides the contextual environment where parliaments operate, Leston-Bandeira body of work on this issue has repeatedly underlined the importance of organizational factors in shaping parliaments' approaches to new technologies. Differences in how parliaments engage with technology to perform their functions and to address citizens often result from the distinctive institutional and organizational environments or constitutional arrangements (Leston-Bandeira and Ward. 2008). Following this theory, the aim is to assess in which way three organizational factors may explain differences across parliaments. Namely, (1) parliaments' financial capacity; (2) parliaments' human capacity and (3) exposure to international parliamentary networks.

Parliamentary capacity: human and financial resources

In their study of the websites of European parliaments, Trechsel et al. (2000) offered an indication on how parliamentary resources can be important in the way the Internet is being used, considering their following statement: 'It seems to us more likely that the differences are due to varying organizational structures, strategies and resources of the respective parliamentary administrations' (2000: 17). Despite only briefly approaching this issue, it is mainly concluded that parliamentary resources matter. Moreover, Griffith and Leston-Bandeira (2012) have reported that insufficient financial resources and lack of staff have been considered some of the challenges that parliaments encounter when using technology to engage with citizens. This is no surprise since in parliamentary literature is well known that resources are said to be one of the key factors determining parliamentary activity (Norton, 1998). Hence, when it comes to technology as emphasized by Sobaci (2012), in no other area is the gulf between rich and poor parliaments more evident than in the facilities available for providing information and research services to parliamentarians.

Accordingly, it is safe to say that when it comes to the use of the Internet and other ICTs by parliaments and parliamentarians, resources matter greatly (Leston-Bandeira 2007). Therefore, in this context, it is crucial to consider 'resources' or 'parliaments' capacity' as a causal condition in the analysis. As with many issues, more innovative and advanced uses of ICTs require the dedication of significant resources – staff and finances (Leston-Bandeira et al. 2008). Furthermore, literature in the field has shown that 'effective public engagement requires considerable resources and financial investment' (Leston-Bandeira, 2014: 432). Besides, comparisons between parliaments on ICT performance can be very misleading if the availability of resources, either financial or human, of each parliament, are not taken into account.

Thus, parliaments with more resources should have stronger online communication apparatuses than parliaments with fewer resources. Based on findings that upheld this hypothesis for parties, Margolis and Resnick (2000: 16) proposed their well- known theory of 'normalization,' according to which offline disparities tend to be reproduced rather than reverted online, thus neutralizing any levelling potential that some optimists attributed to digital media. The same can be tested for parliaments. The premise of Margolis and Resnick hypothesis still holds: for parliaments with larger financial resources at their disposal and large and skilled staffs the opportunity costs of online communication are lower than for parliaments that need to make ends meet with fewer resources. This assumes parliaments as rational systems, which means parliaments calculate the costs and benefits of their communication and choose the communicative tools with the lowest cost or the greatest benefits (Scott, 2003).

Additionally, measuring parliaments' capacity in terms of their financial and human resources also captures, as a proxy, the economic wealth of the cases in the analysis, sparing the need to introduce another condition to the model (e.g. the economic wealth of a country). Theories on modernization argue that long-term secular changes in the economic structure have a strong effect on social and political changes. One of its fundamental proposition is that development leads to democracy, i.e. when people have more wealth, they demand more freedoms, including open and transparent political institutions (Norris, 2001a:105; Inglehart and Welzel, 2005; Bell, 1973; Lipset, 1959). Nevertheless, the analysis employed is still able to assess this argument trough the financial capacity of parliaments' condition.

Exposure to international networks: learning from others

The movement in the direction of E-Democracy is very much dependent upon political strategy and public policy (Treschel et al, 2003). The institutional policy of encouraging engagement and political participation through digital media is a 'discretionary, not an imperative matter', contrary to what cyber optimists advocate (Ibid). Politicians have to understand what are its advantages and disadvantages and must decide whether or not to accept its risks. Otherwise, 'they will ignore or oppose it and continue with their legislative […] business as usual' (Ibid: 56). One way for parliaments to navigate through the advantages and disadvantages of multiple repertoires of engagement supply is by learning through the experience of other parliaments.

In the policy literature, an essential insight is that organizations can learn not only directly from their own experience, but also vicariously from the policy experiments of others. Therefore, the diffusion of a policy of online public engagement can take place via learning, i.e. whenever parliaments draw lessons from the experiences of others and play these lessons in designing their own strategies of public engagement. In his logic, parliaments can efficiently gain new information and eliminate the possibility of e-policy failure by learning from the experience of other countries. Parliaments may discover that it is relatively simple and saves time and money to gain new information just by observing particular experiences' results in other countries when they face uncertainty or difficult political and administrative decisions (Meseguer, 2005).

Given the increasing relevance of international parliamentary networks advocating and promoting the use of ICTs, such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union that holds a worldwide bi-annual conference on the topic, gathering practitioners and politicians worldwide, they can work as a learning mechanism for the parliamentary community, staff and parliamentarians as well. Thus, the more involved a parliament is within these networks, the more channels it has to learn from other parliaments' experiences on the issues of e-democracy. Just as failures provide information about what not to do, good performance and success provide information about alternative courses of action (Ibid). This is especially relevant in the European context where a culture of learning and exchange of knowledge has been promoted for several years. For instance, since the introduction in 2000 of the Open Method of Co-ordination (OMC), national parliaments learn about solutions in other member states (Raunio, 2006).

The parliamentary staff as well parliamentarians derive great benefits from conferences, seminars and symposia promoted by these parliamentary networks (Laundy, 1989). Parliamentary associations such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union provide regular opportunities

for such meetings, both internationally and regionally, where parliamentary practices; administration issues and problems of common concern to those who serve Parliaments are discussed. These networks and associations provide a 'framework for sharing knowledge, coordinating actions, providing technical assistance and pooling information and resources across parliaments around the world, regardless of a country's economic development level' (Sobaci, 2012: 56). They are especially important spaces to discuss anything innovative, such as digital and social media within the operations of parliaments (Sobaci, 2012). However, even before the Internet worldwide expansion, they were already considered extremely valuable (Laundy, 1989) and 'the invisible routes through which individuals make things happen' (Rogers, 2003: 294).

Organizations tend to build and learning process that can take place when organizations are closely connected to others, especially when closely connected to adopters of a technology innovation they learn about it and adopt it earlier (Attewell, 1992). It is indisputable that parliaments might collect benefits from being closely connected to parliamentary networks that promote a culture of knowledge and experiences exchange among the parliamentary community. These benefits may act as incentives for parliaments to adopt ICTs. This can be driven by either resource's considerations, since learning from others may reduce the administrative costs of IT planning and the uncertainty of new experiences. The learning hypothesis relies on the classical theory of incremental decision making and bounded rationality, i.e. policy-learning serves as an effective cost-minimizing strategy and a cognitive short cut (Simon 1957). However, organizational learning and copying is not merely driven by efficiency considerations but is also a way of securing legitimacy. Institutional uncertainty increases mimetic isomorphism and the adaptation of potentially successful models in place elsewhere (DiMaggio and Powel, 1983).

6.2.2 Coding Fuzzy-Set Membership

In the analyses presented in this chapter, a total of five conditions and one outcome are considered. This section discusses the data sources used to operationalize these conditions, as well as the choices made concerning the calibration of the data. For the conditions and the outcome, the 'direct method' of calibration is applied, which means the full membership (1), full non-membership (0), and the crossover point (0.5) were defined as qualitative anchors. (Ragin 2008). Using a logarithmic function, the 'QCA' package in R (version 3.5, Duşa and Thiem 2012) used in this study, then calculates for all cases the fuzzy set membership scores

in a particular condition or the outcome. In the following paragraphs, the methodological choices and operationalisations made are substantiated. These were based on theoretical and substantive grounds: that is, by making sense of the theoretical meaning of the values, and also by considering the distribution of the cases in the individual conditions. The tables in Appendix D (Table D1 to D4) provide the raw data and its sources. All analyses are performed using the free software R, in particular, the QCA package for R, v3.5 (Thiem and Dusa, 2013) and package 'Set methods: Functions for Set-Theoretic Multi-Method Research and Advanced QCA' (Medzihorsky et al. 2016).

To test the argument that *technology diffusion and development* per se influences the pace, spread, and impact on political institutions (Norris, 2001a) an indicator based on the EU survey on the ICT usage in households and by individuals, which captures the *percentage of individuals with basic or above basic overall digital skills* (D) was used. It represents the two highest levels of the overall digital skills indicator, which is a composite indicator based on selected activities performed by individuals aged 16-74 on the Internet in the four specific areas (information, communication, problem-solving, content creation)[66]. It is assumed that individuals who performed certain activities have the corresponding skills; therefore, this indicator can be considered as a proxy of the digital competences and skills of individuals as the data gathered for this indicator reports to the year of 2017. Contemporary research findings indicate that, at least in developed countries, population Internet access availability and their socioeconomic status are not as decisive as people digital skills which are far more important (and better) representations of the digital divide (Dewan, 2005). Therefore, the digital skills of the population are used instead of the Internet penetration rate.

The distribution of cases was considered to determine the calibration anchors. Judging from the Eurostat data, the Netherlands has the most 'digital society' where 79% of the population have basic or above overall digital skills. However, to avoid the fuzzy set scores being influenced too much by outlier cases, the full-membership value relates to the case with the second-highest value of digital skills (71%, UK). Meanwhile, Bulgaria and Romania have less digital societies; only 29% of their population show basic or above overall digital skills,

[66] According to the variety or complexity of activities performed, two levels of skills ('basic' and 'above basic') are computed for each of the four dimensions. Finally, based on the component indicators, the overall digital skills indicator is calculated as a proxy of the digital competences and skills of individuals ('no skills', 'low', 'basic' or 'above basic').

which marks the lower limit for the QCA. This was set as the non-membership. The average value across all countries (57%) is used to determine the crossover point.

Next, to test the influence of citizens' political attitudes, the average of distrust in political institutions (the parliament, government, and parties) in the last five years (DT) reported in cross-national surveys (2013-2017) is used. Despite the fact parliaments are concerned about their image, it seems they are tackling the political distrust as a symptom of the 'overall political crisis'. For this reason, makes sense to look at an aggregate measure combining the political attitudes of citizens not only towards their national parliament but also towards their government and parties. Adding or averaging the levels of confidence that individuals have for a set of political institutions is a common practice (Catterberg and Moreno 2006; Hendriks 2009; Marien and Hooghe 2011). Data from 2013 to 2017 are considered, and for each country, the mean figure for this period is calculated. Therefore, it is possible to control and avoid outliers across cases, i.e. extraordinary specific points in time. This means the variable is not sensible to specific moments in time as if just one time-point was chosen, which in the case of political (dis)trust is utterly important given it may be easily influenced by specific political events in time, such as political scandals. Questions on 'trust in institutions' are asked twice a year in both the 'Standard Eurobarometer' and 'Special Eurobarometer'. The surveys are carried out by the Directorate-General for Communication ('Strategic Communication' Unit) of the European Commission. The methodology is based on a multi-stage, random (probability) sample design applied in all member-states. In each country, a number of sampling points was drawn with probability proportional to population size (for a total coverage of the country) and population density.

The variable corresponds to the average of the percentage of individuals that 'tend to not trust' in these political institutions.[67] The variable scale ranges from 0 to 100. Research on political (dis)trust often considers Netherlands and Sweden exceptional cases of high levels of trust, and consequently low levels of distrust (Turper and Arts, 2017). Sweden (47%), has the lowest value of distrust in the dataset, however, even this value represents a high volume of political distrust, since almost half of the citizens do not trust in political institutions. Thus, to set the non-membership referential, the value of 40% was considered, which also corresponds to a better representation of low levels political distrust in institutions (specifically, two out of

[67] The question used in the analysis was the following: 'I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in certain institutions. For each of the following institutions, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it: 4.1 The (NATIONALITY) government/parliament/parties'.

five individuals), and is more theoretically representative of a society that, in average, trusts more than distrust political institution[68]. As usually reported in the literature the highest levels of distrust are usually found in southern Europe countries like Portugal and Greece, which usually have high levels of political distrust in absolute and comparative terms (Torcal, 2016)[69]. Therefore, since the highest political distrust in the dataset was found in Greece (87%), this will be used to anchor the full-membership. The cross-over point is set at the mean value of the variable, 67.4%.

To measure *parliamentary capacity*, which is constituted by two key elements being human resources as well as financial resources (IPU, 2017), two separated variables will be used[70]. The first variable is denominated as financial parliamentary capacity (F) which consists in the budget of each chamber adjusted to U.S. dollars using the purchasing power parity (PPP) index to enable a broader comparison. Afterwards, this variable was divided by the number of MPs to account for the effect of the size of each chamber – this represents the relative financial capacity of each parliament. The second variable is the human parliamentary capacity (H) measured by the total number of permanent staff members in the chamber. This variable was also divided by the number of MPs – this represents the relative human capacity of each parliament. In the absence of greater data, these two indicators are good proxies to assess parliaments' capacity and its general resources (human and financial). As stressed before, whenever parliaments are mentioned, it means the lower chambers in bicameral structures. Data was collected from the PARLINE dataset (2017) of the Inter-parliamentary Union whenever possible as the main source. Although complementary data was also collected through the European Center for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD) in a collaboration with the Portuguese parliament to fill some gaps. Also and whenever required, national documents such as the chambers' budgets were consulted to comprise more up-to-date data. Most of this data report to the year of 2017, however for a few cases it was only possible to find data for 2013 or 2014 given the lack of update information for both variables (Tables

[68] This procedure does not change the cases belonging to the non-membership set of political distrust, it only slighly changes its fuzzy values to a better representation of what a set of non-members of political distrust should constitute.

[69] There is a notion of a specifically 'southern European' syndrome of low confidence in political institutions (Torcal, 2016).

[70] The two variables are significantly correlated (r=0.732**). However, instead of creating a macro variable the two will enter the model as two separated causal conditions in order to test each one independently.

D2 and D3 in Appendix D present all the details on the sources used and the necessary calculations made).

There is no relevant theoretical baseline to determine the membership values so the determination of the full membership and full non-membership values will be based on the most extreme cases in the distribution. Therefore, for financial parliamentary capacity, the upper threshold is set at 2 155 438$ (full membership=1), equaling the biggest relative parliamentary budget in the dataset which belongs to Italy. While the lower threshold is set at 3 458$ (non-membership=0), equaling the lowest budget belonging to Bulgaria. Since there is no obvious gap between the values of the largest budgets, on the one hand, and the smallest budgets, on the other, there is no apparent crossover point for this condition. So, the mean value of the variable will be used to determine the cross-over point, which is set at 827 967$. Finally, for the human parliamentary capacity condition, the upper threshold is set at 4.85, equaling the chamber with most human resources (Germany); while the lower threshold is set at 1.12 staff by MP (Spain). Again, the cross-over point is set at the mean value of the variable, which is 2.70 staff members for MP.

To test the learning hypothesis, an index of parliaments' participation in the three previous World e-Parliament Conferences (L) was built. The World e-Parliament Conference is a biennial forum of the community of parliaments on the issue of information and communication technology and has been around since 2009. However, for reasons concerning data availability, it was only possible to find the list of participants for the last three conferences (2014, 2016 and 2018). The conference gathers presiding officers and members of parliaments, secretaries-general, parliamentary staff and officials, experts from international organizations and academics who work and deal with information and communication technologies in legislatures. Even though there are other conferences and networks worth to consider, the Wolrd e-Parliament Conference is the ultimate mechanism for parliaments learn from others on the matters of ICTs, in fact, 'Inter-parliamentary cooperation is the deep purpose of conferences' (IPU, 2014). The Conference has gathered a large volume of parliamentary delegations over the years by giving parliaments the 'opportunity to analyse good practices, exchange views on latest trends and institutional developments, learn from each other's experiences, network with peers, and build partnerships in an international setting' (IPU, 2012). The event is co-organized by the United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, through the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament, and hosted in different cities over the years. All

parliaments over the World are invented to participate actively or passively (by participating or listening to panels).

The index scale ranges from 0 to 1. The highest value of participation (1) is taken as the upper limit, since it represents the parliaments that attended all previous three conferences, such as Finland and Portugal. The lowest value (0) is taken as the lower limit, since it represents parliaments that did not attend any of the conferences, such as Estonia and Ireland. The cross-over point was set at 0.5, dividing the cases that attended only once (0.33) and those that attended the conferences twice (0.67).

Finally, the calibration of the outcome. The e-engagement index (ENG) is a composite indicator aggregating three dimensions of public engagement: information supply, communication and interactive multimedia tools supply and also consultation and participation supply. Since details on the selection of these indicators and the coding process of the websites were given in Chapter IV, they will not be repeated here. Nonetheless, at this point, it matters mostly to substantiate the decisions of calibration. The index scale ranges from 0 to 100. The data were calibrated based on the distribution of cases within the sets. Thus, the full-membership value relates to the case with the highest value of e-engagement (83%, UK). Following the same logic, the lower threshold is equal to the value of the case with the lowest value (43%, Spain). The crossover point was determined by calculating the mean score, 63.7%, equating a considerable moderate level of supply of e-engagement activities and tools for parliaments, but sufficient to differentiate parliaments that stand out from those below the average.

Having determined all calibration anchors for the analysis, Table 6.1 presents a summary of the thresholds in each of the conditions and the outcome (see Appendix D for the raw data).

Table 6.1 Conditions and the outcome in the fsQCA

Conditions	*Description*	*Calibration*
D	*Percentage of individuals with basic or above basic overall digital skills.* Higher values imply a higher level of digital skills among population.	1= 71% 0.5=57% 0=29%
DT	*Average of citizens' distrust in political institutions in the last five years* Higher values imply a higher political distrust among population.	1= 87% 0.5=67.4% 0=40%
F	*Financial parliamentary capacity.* Budget of the chamber in purchasing power parity (PPP) dollars divided by the number of MPs. Higher values imply more financial resources.	1=2 155 438$ 0.5= 827 967$ 0=3 458$
H	*Human parliamentary capacity.* Number of permanent staff members in the chamber divided by the number of MPs. Higher values imply more human resources.	1=4.8 0.5=2.7 0=1.1
L	*Index of parliaments' participation in the World e-Parliament Conferences.* Higher values imply higher participation.	1=1 0.5=0.5 0=0
Outcome		
ENG	*E-engagement index.* Higher values imply a better parliamentary supply of online engagement activities and tools.	1=83 0.5=63.7 0=43

Finally, one note on the conditions' selection. Since this is an explorative work, there are a potential abundance of conditions to be considered. Given the existence of competing theories, a large number of conditions often cannot be excluded a priori. In these cases, the standard procedure is to narrow the analysis to a few 'core' theories, but 'even then, the sheer number of competing explanations of the outcome of interest often remains too great' (Berg-Schlosser and de Meur, 2008: 25). Therefore, in order to select the conditions a 'perspectives' approach was adopted, i.e. supplying a mixed bag of conditions derived from the main

theoretical perspectives in the empirical literature. The state of the art (Chapter I) provided a wide range of conditions to take into account. In this process of conditions' selection, 'it is very important to keep the number of conditions quite low, especially in small-or intermediate-N research designs' (Ibid: 27). The danger of including many conditions is that empirically observed cases will occupy only a tiny proportion of the potential logical space, which is known as the limited diversity problem. In the end, by analysing many conditions in relation to the cases, we shall obtain an individual explanation for each individual case. For this reason, the number of conditions was limited to five, following Berg-Schlosser and de Meur (2008: 28) recommendation: 'an intermediate-N analysis (10 to 40 cases) would be to select from 4 to 6-7 conditions'. The fewer the 'number of 'causes' we need to explain a phenomenon of interest, the closer we come to the 'core' elements of causal mechanism' (Ibid: 27). Table 6.3 presents the calibrated data for the analysis.

Table 6.2 Calibrated data for the fsQCA

	Conditions					*Outcome*
Cases	**D**	**DT**	**L**	**F**	**H**	**ENG**
Austria	0.89	0.19	0.95	0.18	0.44	0.27
Belgium	0.70	0.32	0.27	0.70	0.87	0.27
Bulgaria	0.05	0.75	0.05	0.05	0.16	0.05
Croatia	0.16	0.88	0.05	0.11	0.10	0.05
Denmark	0.95	0.17	0.27	0.35	0.48	0.95
Estonia	0.65	0.22	0.05	0.18	0.50	0.58
Finland	0.98	0.12	0.95	0.40	0.34	0.27
France	0.50	0.76	0.95	0.73	0.27	0.75
Germany	0.91	0.16	0.27	0.90	0.95	0.95
Greece	0.24	0.95	0.05	0.44	0.92	0.17
Hungary	0.32	0.48	0.95	0.77	0.50	0.75
Ireland	0.28	0.51	0.05	0.57	0.74	0.27
Italy	0.20	0.86	0.95	0.95	0.20	0.58
Netherlands	0.99	0.19	0.05	0.64	0.84	0.45
Portugal	0.32	0.69	0.95	0.72	0.11	0.84
Romania	0.05	0.79	0.05	0.29	0.90	0.45
Slovakia	0.60	0.61	0.05	0.27	0.54	0.75
Slovenia	0.42	0.92	0.05	0.22	0.57	0.45
Spain	0.45	0.91	0.95	0.17	0.05	0.00
Sweden	0.99	0.10	0.27	0.28	0.17	0.45
UK	0.95	0.51	0.95	0.24	0.81	0.99

6.3 RESULTS

The remainder of the chapter presents the results of the fsQCA. This approach is structured around the search for necessary and sufficient conditions for a certain outcome to be present or absent (see e.g. Schneider and Wagemann, 2012). Firstly, it was assessed whether any single explanatory conditions can be considered necessary for the presence (or absence) of online public engagement supply. Afterwards, it was considered whether there are any

(combinations of) conditions whose presence is sufficient for high or low online public engagement supply.

A few notes before the results. First, according to the common notation system in QCA, all the conditions and the outcome variables are indicated by a capital letter to indicate their presence (F), and a lowercase for the absence (f). Moreover, in Boolean algebra, the signs + (addition) and * (multiplication) are used to explain the relation between several conditions. This needs further clarification since the addition sign (+) stands for the logical 'or', while the multiplication sign (*) means a logical 'and'. Finally, there are three possible solutions in QCA that can be reported: conservative (or complex), intermediate, and parsimonious solution. They differ with regards to the assumption they make about logical remainders. They are fully reported in Appendix F, but the analysis focuses on the intermediate solution. Second, according to the principle of causal asymmetry, necessity and sufficiency are also tested for the absence of the outcome, and the absence of conditions is tested both for the outcome and its absence. Only relevant results (over the conventional consistency threshold of 0.75) will be reported. All analyses are performed using the free software R, in particular, the QCA package for R, v3.5 (Thiem and Dusa, 2013) and package 'Set methods: Functions for Set-Theoretic Multi-Method Research and Advanced QCA' (Medzihorsky et al. 2016).

6.3.1 Assessment of necessity

The first step in a QCA is the analysis of necessary conditions. A necessary condition is a condition that needs to be present in order for parliaments' high (or low) supply of online public engagement to occur. The presence of this condition alone, however, does not automatically imply the presence (or absence) of the outcome, since additional factors may be relevant as well. The necessity test is based on a 'set-theoretic consistency' formula (Ragin, 2006: 291).

Taking the online public engagement supply of parliaments as the outcome, the analysis provided the following consistency scores for each of the necessary conditions: D (0.78), F (0.70), H (0.70), DT (0.63), and L (0.58). The consistency threshold was set at 0.9. As the scores show, there is no perfect subset relationship between one of the conditions and the outcome considering all consistency values are below 1. This is not a surprise since 'perfectly consistent set relations are relatively rare in social research' (Ragin, 2006: 2). The plot between the outcome and each condition is reported in Appendix F (Figure F1).

No higher scores were found when the conditions were negated (that is, when it was assessed whether the absence of certain conditions was necessary for the supply of e-engagement activities). Additionally, it was assessed whether there were any conditions necessary for the absence of a supply of e-engagement. This analysis did not produce consistency values close to 1.

6.3.2 Assessment of sufficiency

The next aim of the analysis is to determine which (combinations of) conditions are sufficient for the presence (or absence) of parliaments' supply of online public engagement. To assess the sufficiency of configurations, the first step is to calculate the membership of each case in these configurations. By means of the data calibration process outlined in the first part of this chapter, each case has previously received a fuzzy set membership score between 0 and 1 in each of the conditions. Table 6.3 presents the truth table, which provides three important pieces of information for each of the logically possible combinations of the conditions analysed. First, the consistency value running from 0 to 1 in column 'Inclusion' and, second, the number of cases that have a membership in the respective causal combination higher than 0.5 in column 'N'. Third, the column 'ENG' indicates for each causal combination (a) whether it passes the test criteria for 'very often sufficient' and (b) whether it contains enough cases. If these two conditions are fulfilled, the combination passes the test, meaning that it is a sufficient condition for ENG (e-engagement). In essence, the column 'ENG' indicates which of the causal combinations produce the outcome (1, rows 1–6, twelve cases), and which ones do not (0, row 7-11, nine cases). The combinations with no empirical instances were deleted from the table. Finally, the last column 'Cases' indicates which cases are described by the respective row (i.e., a combination of conditions).

Table 6.3 Truth table for e-engagement index (ENG)

Conditions						Outcome			
Config.	D	DT	L	F	H	ENG	Inclusion	Cases	N
1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0.981	UK	1
2	0	0	1	1	1	1	0.976	HU	1
3	1	1	0	0	1	1	0.932	SK	1
4	1	0	0	0	0	1	0.891	DK, EE, SE	3
5	0	1	1	1	0	1	0.890	FR, IT, PT	3
6	1	0	0	1	1	1	0.823	DE, BE, NL	3
7	1	0	1	0	0	0	0.792	FL, AT	2
8	0	1	0	1	1	0	0.778	IE	1
9	0	1	1	0	0	0	0.750	ES	1
10	0	1	0	0	1	0	0.705	GR, RO, SL	3
11	0	1	0	0	0	0	0.583	BG, HR	2

As Table 6.3 shows the 21 cases can be organized into 11 out of 32 (2_5) logically possible combinations. This implies that there are 21 logical remainders – that is, combinations for which empirical evidence is lacking. This is a normal situation of limited diversity, common in comparative social science (Schneider and Wagemann 2006). This analysis considers only configurations with an inclusion coefficient higher than 0.82[71]. This means that the first six rows indicate the configurations that are considered as sufficient for the outcome: 12 out of 21 cases are therefore covered. All the other rows are not considered as sufficient configurations for the outcome (Ragin, 2008; Schneider and Wagemann, 2012). As expected the truth table is too complex to interpret given the number of configurations. Thus, a formalized procedure for the logical reduction of complexity was applied, namely the Quine-McClusky algorithm for dichotomous data (Ragin 1987). This algorithm discards all redundant information from the selected truth table rows (Schneider and Wagemann, 2012), which results are presented in Table 6.4.

The sufficiency test moves away from looking at single conditions and aims to identify configurations of conditions that are sufficient for parliaments' e-engagement supply. The first

[71] Other inclusion cut-offs have been tested but they are not reported for reasons of space. The results remain consistent with the expectations.

solution is called complex or conservative, and it makes no assumptions about the configurations for which there are no observed cases (logical reminders). The intermediate solution, on the other hand, includes directional expectation: in other words, each condition is supposed to trigger high levels of online public engagement supply. Finally, for the most parsimonious solution, a hypothetical outcome is allocated to the configurations without observed cases as long as this leads to a simpler (more parsimonious) solution. There is a difference of opinion about whether one solution is better than the other. However, the intermediate solution allows for the inclusion of easy counterfactuals, which make it easy to interpret than the complex solution (Schneider and Wagemann, 2012: 165–177). For reasons of space, the conservative and parsimonious solutions will not be presented here (see Appendix F).

The formula obtained for the intermediate solution is:

D∗l + D∗DT∗H + DT∗ L∗ F + L∗F∗H => ENG

This means the intermediate solution reveals four alternative paths to the outcome. Specifically, this means that a combination of high levels of digital literacy (D) and low levels of learning exposure (l) or (+) a combination of high levels of digital literacy (D), high levels of political distrust (DT) and high levels of human resources (H), or (+) a combination of high levels of political distrust (DT) and high levels of learning exposure, or (+) a final path combining high levels of learning exposure (L), high levels of financial resources (F) and high levels of human resources (H) are sufficient to explain parliaments' online public engagement supply.

The analysis discerns multiple paths to high supply of online public engagement activities and tools - as expected no homogeneity paths are leading to high supply of online. Perhaps the most striking feature of this equation is that the learning condition can take opposite values, yet still result in high levels of public engagement due to the presence and absence of other conditions.

Additionally, Table 6.4 contains vital information, such as the parameters of fit of the model. First, this solution formula explains 80% of the cases. Also, it shows that the fourth path (L∗F∗H) has lower raw coverage scores than the remaining, indicating that this path covers fewer cases in the data set (it only covers Hungary). Also, looking at unique coverage is meaningful because it indicates how many cases a given path can explain without any other

path offering explanation (Legewie, 2013). Therefore, the first and third paths gain relevance, because without them more cases would be beyond the explanatory reach of the model. Often there is considerable overlap between paths, so it is not unusual for the unique coverage scores to be rather low (< .18) (Ibid). This shows how many cases with the occurrence of the outcome can be explained in more than one way, such as happens with Slovakia.

Table 6.4 Outcome enabling configurations (intermediate solution term)

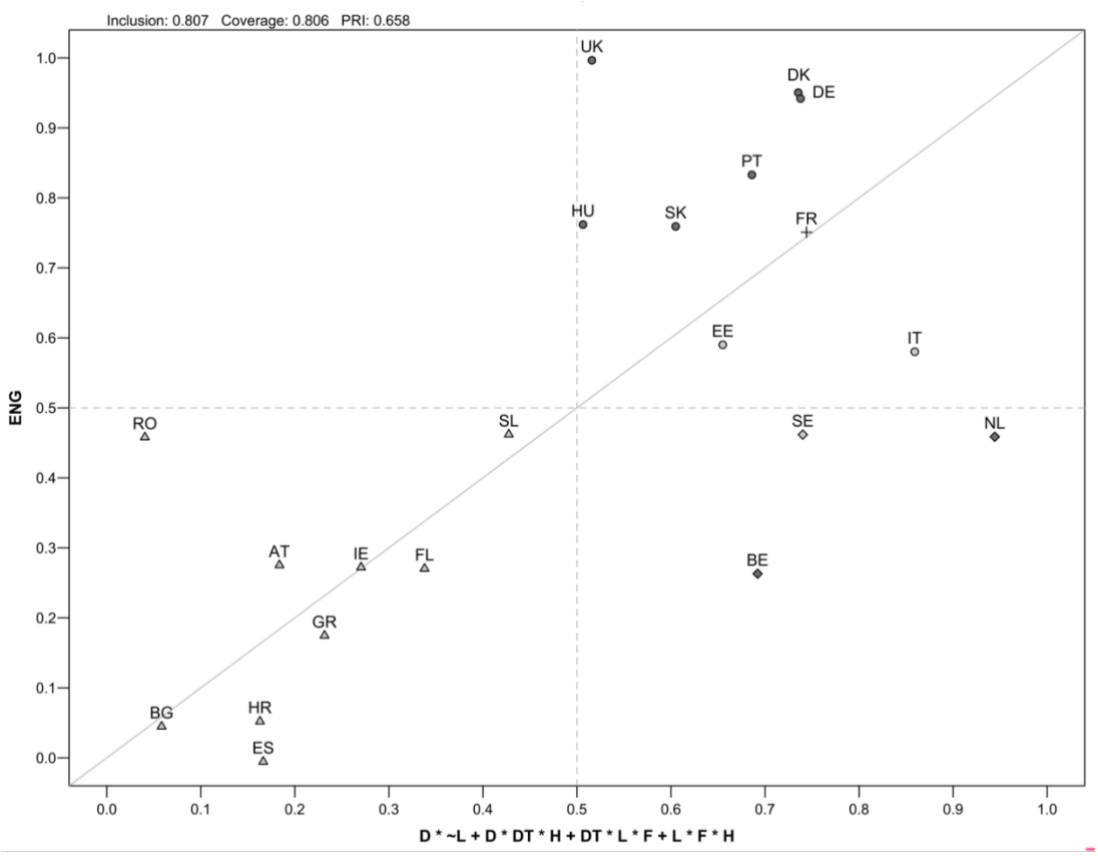
	Solution/ Configuration consistency	*Solution coverage*	*Configuration raw coverage**	*Configuration unique coverage**
Model: D∗l + D∗f + DT∗ L∗ F => E				
Model parameters:	0.807	0.806		
D∗l	0.774		0.503	0.184
D∗DT∗H	0.949		0.424	0.028
DT∗ L∗ F	0.903		0.404	0.140
L∗F∗H	0.961		0.308	0.017

Note: ∗Raw coverage includes cases explained by more than one configuration, while unique coverage includes only cases exclusively covered by that configuration.

Figure 6.1 presents the plot between the outcome and the solution, which has an inclusion coefficient of 0.807 (consistency) and coverage of 0.806, indicating the absence of deviant cases coverage, i.e. cases with higher score in the solution rather than in the outcome (upper-left quadrant). This means there are, therefore, none truly logically contradictory cases. This confirms the quality of the model and the explanatory power of the conditions to explain the presence of the outcome. The plot uses point characters to distinguish cases that are available in set-theoretic multi-method research (MMR): typical cases, deviant cases for consistency in kind, deviant cases for consistency in degree, deviant cases for coverage, and individually irrelevant (IIR) cases (Schneider and Rohlfing, 2013). The dark filled points in zone 1 (upper right quadrant, above the diagonal) indicate the typical cases – UK, Denmark, Germany, Portugal, Slovakia and Hungary. These cases, of which we have five in our data, are typical because they are empirical instances of a sufficient relationship between the solution and the outcome. They display the outcome and are members of one or more of the conjunctions. The most typical case, closest to the main diagonal, is France. Also, there are two deviant cases consistency in degree, namely Estonia and Italy (the light-filled points in

zone 2) and three deviant cases consistency in kind, namely Belgium, Sweden, Netherlands (diamond shape in zone 3). Finally, the triangles in zone 4, indicate there are nine irrelevant cases, they are neither members of the outcome nor of the solution - such cases contribute nothing to answering questions about necessary or sufficient conditions. They become relevant in comparison with a typical case, though (Schneider and Rohlfing, 2013), which will take place in the next chapter.

Figure 6.1 Plot with solution for E-engagement (outcome = ENG)



Although the solution formula is not elegant, it is interpretable. The analysis shows that both organizational factors and contextual factors are sufficient conditions for high supply of online public engagement activities and tools. Also, as expected no homogeneity paths are leading to high supply of online public engagement. Different paths combine multiple factors, both structural and organizational. A lesson to be learned from this fsQCA is that the performance of parliaments in terms of their online public engagement supply is largely a matter of their own agency as well of structural factors - all paths share a combination of both factors (except for one, which only covers one case). Also, most paths share either the financial

resources or human resources of parliaments, which stresses again that when it comes to the use of Internet and other ICTs by parliaments, resources matter greatly (Leston-Bandeira 2007).

The four paths show that both pushing and pulling factors matter to explain parliaments' performance when using ICTs, as it mainly relies on a combination of parliaments' resource capacities and its environment pressures. It is interesting to note that both human and financial resources are individually sufficient conditions (in combination with other conditions) for the supply of online public engagement activities. This result reinforces the choice of separating the two conditions instead of creating a macro variable.

In particular, the third path (DT* L* F) provides the basis for a plausible account as to why parliaments in the associated countries have been investing in online public engagement activities. This path, which covers the cases of France, Italy, Portugal and UK, reveals an interesting combination of how the context where parliaments operate (high political distrust) and its resources (financial and human) as well learning opportunities lead to high levels of online public engagement.

Additionally, these results reinforce the widespread belief that many policymakers are engaging with ICTs as an effective response to high levels of disillusionment and disenchantment with the political process, or that many parliaments have embarked on an endless pursuit of trust. Political distrust is present in two different paths. This is an interesting result that means citizens disenchantment with politics are a powerful incentive for countries to rethink their parliaments' digital strategies, as recent literature has reported (Gabriel, 2008; Theiner et al., 2018).

Concerning the analysis of the low e-engagement supply (the absence of the outcome, ran with a consistency threshold of 0.84), it is worthwhile to discuss the parsimonious solution[72], as it points out that the lack of parliamentary resources, both financial and human resources, is crucial to explain the absence of high levels of-engagement supply. For reasons of space, the outcomes will not be discussed in detail, but it is clear the lack of parliamentary resources was in most cases a key ingredient for the lack of a strong online public engagement strategy (see Appendix F, Tables F4 to F6). This solution also points out that learning mechanisms from exposure to others are not always crucial in explaining the absence of high levels of e-engagement supply. The expectation, is that exposure to policy experiments of

[72] The choice to report the parsimonious was due to the high quality of the parameters of this solution (inclusion= 0.879; coverage=0.782) compared to other solutions.

others parliaments are still relevant for parliaments when designing their online public strategies, but probably more for substantive activities, where the risks are higher for parliaments and they can efficiently gain new information and eliminate the possibility of e-policy failure by learning from the experience of other countries (Meseguer 2005).

Finally, from the QCA is possible to select two interesting cases for further study, specifically to answer the final and third research question of this thesis. Therefore, a positive and negative cases were chosen. The positive case corresponds in set-theoretic multi-method research to a typical case, which is a case where the outcome occurs, exemplifies a stable, cross-case relationship and is well explained by the existing causal model. The negative case is simply a case where the outcome does not occur, which in set-theoretic multi-method research correspond to the category of irrelevant cases (Mikkelsen, 2017).

Analysing two opposite cases will help to advance the literature on online public engagement since it allows to understand the causal mechanisms and processes beyond different parliamentary strategies of engagement with citizens and its final outcomes. Based on these techniques of case selection, Portugal and Austria were chosen as the two case studies. Portugal as a positive/typical case and Austria as a negative case. This choice was based on several factors.

Firstly, both cases illustrate contrasting results in several dimensions of public engagement (and therefore the occurrence of the outcome) as well as regarding the causal conditions explaining their variation (as assessed though the qualitative comparative analysis undergone) Second, based on the ease of access to data, Portugal was selected as the typical case to study further. Additionally, Portugal is a member of only one term of the solution, and these are superior choices for cases analysis compared to cases with joint membership, i.e. when a typical case is a member of more than one term (Schneider and Rohlfing, 2013). While, Austria was chosen, as negative case, given its overall low e-engagement performance (below the average)[73], but puzzling result given its endeavours to promote substantive engagement. This allows us to enrich the analysis by again disentangle the multiple ways parliaments engage with citizens and complement the QCA analysis.

[73] There other negative cases in the sample, such as Spain. However, Austria is indeed a puzzling case as shown earlier. Besides, following the Possibility Principle of Mahoney and Goertzn (2004) a negative case to further study must be one where the outcome has a real possibility of occurring in this case, i.e. at least one independent variable of the theory under investigation predicts its occurrence/absence, which is clearly the case of Austria.

Additionally, these two cases also allow me to analyse the mechanisms of causality and chain of events and process (and actors) leading to the supply of public engagement over time, but also provides the opportunity to understand the strategies of substantive engagement in place in both parliaments, given they are both experimenting with substantive ways to engage with citizens, even though their overall e-engagement performance are dissimilar

6.4 SUMMARY OF MAIN RESULTS

This chapter has analysed the necessary and sufficient conditions for the outcome to occur, i.e. the supply of online public engagement activities and tools (high levels of e-engagement). The model tested in this chapter focuses on pulling and pushing factors (supply- and demand-side factors) derived from the relevant literature and seems to explain quite well the overall levels of high supply of e-engagement. None of the single conditions is necessary for the outcome to be present (or absent), but both structural factors (demand side) and organizational factors (supply-side) are sufficient to explain high levels of e-engagement supply in more than 80% of the cases (0.806) while having an acceptable coefficient for inclusion (0.807).

From this analysis, one can conclude that both structural and organizational conditions have indeed some resonance with the overall supply of parliaments' e-engagement. Like most parliamentary affairs, the online public engagement supply of parliaments is the result of both the agency of the political actors who operate in it and a by-product of the political, economic, social and cultural contexts in which parliaments are engaged (Pierson, 2004). While, the lack of institutional instruments and activities of public engagement is explained by the lack of parliamentary resources, both financial and human resources. As expected management structures is a key ingredient explaining the lack of a strong online public engagement strategy (see Appendix F, Tables F4 to F6). Additionally, it was interesting to observe that parliaments can do well even when they have not participated in inter-parliamentary networks, such as the IPU, promoting a digital agenda for parliamentary institutions. Learning mechanisms, from exposure to international networks promoting a digital agenda for parliaments, do not always translate into better parliamentary public engagement.

These results also indicate that a more precise analysis is required to explain the relevance of cooperation among parliaments when it comes to digital strategies of public engagement. To what extent this cooperation increases parliamentarians' and staff's

knowledge about possible strategies and activities of public engagement? This will be further explored in the next chapter through the multiple case studies.

Several main observations were possible to make based on the analyses presented in this chapter. However, there is reason to treat these findings with some caution. These observations only account for the global e-engagement index, which might hide unintentionally different and complex realities. Although, it would be interesting to assess the mechanisms and factors beyond parliaments' choice to invest, for instance, in more time-consuming and demanding activities to promote public engagement, such as public consultations (substantive engagement), the distribution of cases in this variable does not allow for such analysis, since the large majority of parliaments do not display any form of substantive engagement supply. As discussed, this method is not suitable to disentangle the different ladders of e-engagement supply, and assess whether different causal paths can be observed for different types of engagement supply (information, communication and interactive multimedia, and consultation and political participation). Therefore, there is reason to treat these findings with some caution.

While this chapter has established a potential link between five theoretically based conditions and a political outcome (e-engagement supply), further assessment necessitates the constitution of a stronger causal relationship. A rigorous combination of QCA and post-QCA case studies yields added inferential value compared to the application of one of the methods alone (Schneider and Rohlfing, 2013). QCA regulates any analysis of set-relational possibilities that are beyond the abilities of small to intermediate-N to determine, it established a strong background that justifies the use of case studies as a constructive addition to QCA.

Therefore, the next chapter aims to compare two cases, a typical case (Portugal) and an irrelevant case (Austria), in QCA terminology. Irrelevant cases should not be confused as outliers, they are simply non-members of the solution and the outcome, but they become relevant in comparison with a typical case (Schneider and Rohlfing, 2013; Oana and Schneider, 2018). The benefit of the comparison of a typical case and an irrelevant case is to empirically investigate whether a sufficient term is a difference-maker, i.e. causal, not only for the outcome at the cross-case level but also for the mechanism at the within-case level (Oana and Schneider, 2018).

CHAPTER VII

A TALE OF TWO PARLIAMENTS: AUSTRIA AND PORTUGAL

'For years, we have this discussion about more citizen participation, especially to have more and more effective instruments of direct democracy'

Cristoph Konrath

- Senior official of the Austrian parliament

The previous chapter tested key theoretical explanations in the analysis of the conditions leading to high supply levels of parliaments' online public engagement. The results of the fsQCA consistently indicated both structural and organisational factors as important conditions for explaining parliaments' digital endeavours to engage with their citizens. However, the results have shown some ambiguities regarding the impact of structural and contextual factors. In addition, the previous analysis still left open some important questions on who is involved in these processes and strategies of public engagement. How do such changes come about? Why did the parliament find itself embracing a public engagement strategy through the Internet at that time and under those circumstances? When is parliamentary change most likely to occur – and under which set of forces and conditions?

To the extent that online public engagement has been measured and broadly explained, the first two research questions of this dissertation have been answered. Thus, following the scheme of the mixed method design employed here – hybrid explanatory sequential design – the qualitative strand continues and now tries to understand the question *what are the mechanisms, processes and critical actors explaining parliaments' online public engagement strategies over time?*

As described in Chapter II, the aim of this phase is twofold: to discuss and refine the findings and gaps left open by the results delivered by the fsQCA and to understand by which *processes and mechanisms (and actors)* parliaments are changing and adapting their relationships with citizens through the use of ICT, since the previous analysis only provided a glimpse of the phenomena at a single unique moment of time. Therefore, these two goals are carried out by a qualitative comparative analysis of two case studies – Austria and Portugal.

To set up and frame this part of the thesis, this chapter is organised around four main sections, which will facilitate the in-depth qualitative analysis in the following chapter. First, section 7.1 displays the methods and techniques applied for this study. Second, section 7.2 devotes time to overviewing the main changes parliaments have undergone over time, while always taking into account the broad political context and the main features of parliamentary politics in both countries. Third, section 7.3 moves to the process of public engagement, the causal mechanism behind it and the role of critical actors. Finally, section 7.4 presents the main conclusions drawn from the analysis presented in this chapter.

7.1. A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY APPROACH

To answer the third research question of this thesis, a *multiple case study* approach was conducted (Yin, 2014) and *process tracing* and *elite in-depth semi-structured interviews* were employed to collect and analyse the data. Evidence from a series of elite in-depth semi-structured interviews developed with parliamentary officials, local experts and members of parliament (MPs) conducted in 2018 and 2019 in the Portuguese and Austrian parliaments was collected, as well as data from key documental and technical sources such as committee reports.

Since this chapter aims, among other goals, to understand by which *processes and mechanisms (and actors)* parliaments are changing and adapting their relationships with citizens through the use of ICTs, qualitative research plays an important role. Specifically, the study of processes, mechanisms, actors and leadership involves multiple levels, dynamics and symbolic components, making them a complex phenomenon (Conger, 1998).

While the previous cross-national approach provides an explanation by comparing different cases at one unique point of time, at this phase it will be possible to understand how parliaments have been changing throughout the years since they started to realise the potential of ICT tools and to develop institutional activities and tools for online public engagement. Moreover, through the deep qualitative analysis of the mechanisms and processes beyond parliaments' strategies of online public engagement, it will also be possible to unveil rival explanatory factors that might refine the findings or fill the gaps left open by the previous analysis concerning the variables that explain parliaments' supply on these matters.

A multiple case study design implies extensive data collection from different sources, as well as multiple levels of data analysis (Yin, 2014). This type of research design includes more than one case, and the analysis was performed at two levels: within each case and across

the cases chosen (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). This form of case study still strives for the 'thick description' common in single case studies; however, the goal of comparative (multiple) case studies is to discover contrasts, similarities or patterns across the cases. In a multiple case study design, each individual case is less important in itself than the comparison that it offers to the others (Yin, 2014); therefore, this chapter will devote more time to cross-case comparisons than individual descriptions of each case. To this end, *process tracing* and *in-depth semi-structured elite interviews* were employed in order to investigate causal and temporal mechanisms of parliamentary public engagement in its real-world context.

Process tracing and elite interviews

Process tracing provides a crucial method for the analysis of complex political phenomena, and rightly places an emphasis on uncovering the causal mechanisms that connect independent and dependent variables (Beach, 2017). By prioritising fine-grained research, this method allows for the identification of critical steps and stages of parliamentary public engagement policies and strategies; therefore, it can both generate and assess critical data, enhancing both theory development and theory testing (Tansey, 2007). Although discussions of process tracing tend to emphasise the historical method and archival research over other forms of data collection, elite interviewing is 'highly relevant for process tracing approaches to case study research' (Ibid.: 766). This is particularly the case because elite actors – parliamentary actors in particular – were critical sources of information about the political processes of interest, i.e. online parliamentary public engagement.

Political elite interviews provide insights into events about the activities and processes that take place out of the public or media gaze, i.e. behind closed doors (Peabody et al., 1990; Lilleker, 2003). Through interviews with parliamentary officials and MPs, it was possible to learn more about the inner workings of the political and administrative process, the machinations between influential actors and how a sequence of events was viewed and responded to within the political machine. In addition, parliamentary staff and MPs are the only sources of information on their own motivations regarding the use of ICTs to engage with citizens, which is extremely interesting to analyse at this stage of the research.

The interviewees were selected through a purposive sampling strategy (Mosley, 2013), according to their role in the management and implementation of parliaments' public engagement. Thus, interviewees mainly included officials working in the services delivering

public engagement, comprising key senior figures in the management of parliament, its administration and public engagement, as well junior-level interviewees. Relevant MPs that have been more directly involved in some of the recent reforms made on the delivery of public engagement were also included, specifically those that have been working in parliamentary committees directly connected to the topic being studied. In addition, national experts, including senior academics and consultants for parliamentary affairs were also interviewed in both countries (see Appendix G, H and I).[74] The fieldwork was done between September and October of 2018 in the Austrian Parliament and between January and February of 2019 in the Portuguese Parliament. The interviews were analysed through computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, namely MaxQDA.

The importance of officials' narratives in the establishment of parliamentary public engagement strategies should not be underestimated, but rather valued (Leston-Bandeira, 2016). While parliamentary officials' contributions always matter, they matter particularly in the case of public engagement, in which the role of officials is much more visible and prominent than it is, for instance, in activities supporting the roles of legislation and scrutiny. Literature has shown that public engagement has developed mainly as an activity parallel to core parliamentary business, which explains the importance of the specific roles officials played (Leston-Bandeira, 2016; Pollak and Slominski, 2014).

We generally know very little about how parliament is organised or the support capacities of parliamentary officials (Crewe, 2017; Geddes and Mulley, 2018; Judge and Leston-Bandeira, 2018). This is a significant oversight, because the way that parliament is administered is essential for conducting an effective democracy (Geddes and Meakin, 2018). Ultimately, officials are increasingly important, given that they are the ones left with the responsibility of determining what should be developed and delivering it (Leston-Bandeira, 2016).

Although, Leston-Bandeira states that this type of activity has a largely non-political nature, when it comes to substantive methods of public engagement (political participation), it gains a political dimension, which means that MPs and other political figures are also important in this puzzle. Hence, the focus here is placed on both officials and political figures, mainly MPs and, to a lesser extent, public consultants that also play a role in the development of these process and national experts.

[74] Interviews in Austria were conducted in English.

The interviews were complemented by an extensive documentary analysis of key documents detailing information on the management of the institution and particularly on the strategies developed to implement public engagement. This includes the reports from selected relevant committees and working groups in parliament that are particularly connected to the issue in question. The documentary analysis was used to map the expansion of public engagement over time and its respective key priorities, as well as to triangulate and support the interviews. Therefore, the research focuses on the narrative presented by the institution and its officials and MPs.

Comparing Austria and Portugal

To research the mechanisms, processes and actors involved in the strategies of public engagement over time, a *positive* and *a negative case* were selected. This method is appropriate when the primary objective is to unveil the processes and causal mechanisms behind different political outcomes.

Portugal (as a positive case) and Austria (as a negative) are ideal for this analysis, and the selection of these countries is supported by the following reasons.[75] First, these two cases illustrate contrasting results across several dimensions of public engagement (and therefore the occurrence of the outcome). On the one hand, Portugal is well above the average, with a high overall public engagement score and above the average in all of the dimensions concerning public engagement instruments and features. On the other hand, Austria has an overall low e-engagement score (below the average)[76] with a particularly low score in one of the dimensions of public engagement – communication and interactive multimedia. Second, Portugal is a typical case set-theoretic multi-method research, which means it exemplifies a stable, cross-case relationship and is well explained by the existing causal model, as was shown in the previous chapter. Meanwhile, Austria is simply a case where the outcome does not occur, which in set-theoretic multi-method research corresponds to the category of irrelevant cases (Mikkelsen, 2017), as the qualitative comparative analysis has shown. These cases 'are neither

[75] Following the sequential explanatory design, the selection of the cases for this specific strand are mainly based on the quantitative strand and the explanatory analysis assessed by the QCA.

[76] There were other negative cases in the sample, such as Spain. However, Austria, in contrast to Spain, is indeed a puzzling case, as was shown earlier. Besides, following the Possibility Principle of Mahoney and Goertzn (2004) a negative case for further study must be one where the outcome has a real possibility of occurring in this case, i.e. at least one independent variable of the theory under investigation predicts its occurrence/absence, which is clearly the case for Austria.

members of the outcome nor of the condition' but 'become relevant in comparison with a typical case, though' (Schneider and Rohlfing, 2013: 581). Therefore, by exploring the Austrian case, we can show how an explicitly possible outcome fails to come about. This may highlight a need to refine the mechanisms proposed to produce the outcome in positive cases (Mikkelsen, 2017).

Additionally, these two cases also allow us to analyse the strategies of substantive engagement in place in both parliaments, given that they are both experimenting with substantive ways to engage with citizens, even though their overall e-engagement performances are dissimilar. While Austria was chosen as a negative case, given its generally low e-engagement performance (below the average), it has a puzzling result given its endeavours to promote substantive engagement. Although Austria is below the average, it scores well above other cases when it comes to substantive instruments and features to promote public engagement, which make it an interesting negative case. This allows us to enrich the analysis by once again disentangling the multiple ways parliaments engage with citizens, complementing the QCA analysis and illustrating the gradations of public engagement. Therefore, the benefit of comparing these two cases – Portugal and Austria – is to empirically investigate whether a sufficient term is a difference-maker, i.e. causal not only for the outcome at the cross-case level but also for the mechanism at the within-case level (Oana and Schneider, 2018).

Next, an overview of these two cases is presented, including a longitudinal and historical analysis of the two institutions, the Austrian' Nationalrat and the Portuguese Assembleia da República (AR). This will be the starting point of the multiple case study analysis.

7.2 PORTUGAL AND AUSTRIA: AN OVERVIEW

Before the results of the case studies are discussed in greater detail, this section will outline a landscape portrait of the political context and institutional features which informed the set-up and development of each parliament. Thus, this section presents and explains the role of each parliament within the overall political systems and its relationship with the public over the years – and consequently with ICTs.

Portugal and Austria share a few institutional features, which make this comparison even more interesting and relevant in order to understand the causal mechanisms and process

of their different strategies of public engagement and different levels of public engagement supply. Especially relevant is the fact that these two parliaments are interesting examples for investigating how strongly party-based parliaments that abide by a national mandate develop direct links with citizens.

Portugal and Austria are both semi-presidential regimes with weak heads of state and strong heads of government, which is similar to the situation in many parliamentary systems (Elgie, 1999; Duverger, 1992); therefore, the parliamentary side prevails in practice. Although Austria has a two-chamber system, which reflects its federal constitution, it is a very asymmetrical one (Erk, 2004; Müller, 2005). The upper chamber (Bundesrat) can only delay legislation passed by the Nationalrat (Müller, 2005), with the exception of changes to the constitution that shift the jurisdiction between the federation and the Länder. According to its constitution, Austria is a federation, but in practice, the country works as a unitary state. Politicians, interest groups, professional associations, trade unions and, most importantly, voters 'see politics in nationwide terms and act accordingly' (Erk, 2004: 2).

Both institutions – the Portuguese parliament (Assembleia da República) and the Austrian parliament (Nationalrat) – are heavily party-centred institutions where parliamentary groups are the main units of organisation (Müller, 2005). Both party systems have been structured by the antagonism between two large parties, on one the left and other on the right: the socialist/Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) and the Christian Social Party and its successor, the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) in Austria and the left-wing Socialist party (PS) and the right-wing Social Democratic Party (PSD) in Portugal. Meanwhile, small parties have traditionally played secondary roles (Treib, 2012; Lobo et al., 2010).

Although some features of the electoral systems are different, these two cases have proportional representational systems in which parties are perceived as the main representative mediators; both cases have a multi-party system, and parliamentary elections decide the distribution of political power. In Austria, there has been a partially open-list system since 1992, meaning that voters can cast preferential votes for candidates on the list in addition to the party list (Marsh, 1985).[77] However, the electoral system still gives political parties complete control over candidate selection (Treib, 201). Meanwhile, in Portugal there have been several discussions on this topic, especially in regard to opening the lists in order to improve

[77] The Austrian electoral system calls for voters to indicate a party choice and an optional candidate choice. Where no candidate choice is given, the party's top-listed candidate receives the vote (Marsh, 1985).

the quality of democracy; however, these discussions have been unsuccessful – the closed list system still remains (Lobo and Serra-Silva, 2018).

In addition to elections, there have been attempts in both countries to open up additional venues for people to become involved in the political process, such as referendums, people's initiatives (or agenda initiatives) and consultative referendums (Müller, 1992; 1999). The Austrian constitution contains a variety of direct democratic participation instruments. However, their character is only complementary, and no federal- or state-level law can be adopted by the people against the will of a majority in parliament. The primacy of representative democracy and its institutions has been preserved (Müller, 1992; Gise, 2012). Similarly, the Portuguese constitution also contains just a few instruments for political participation, such as the right to submit petitions[78] established in the Portuguese Constitution of 1976 (Tibúrcio, 2015) and the citizens' legislative initiative.

Especially in Portugal, since the mid-1980s, parliament has evolved from having a role centred on law-making to one with a legitimising function (Neto and Lobo, 2009; Leston-Bandeira, 2009; Goes and Leston-Bandeira, 2019). That is, '[the] prevailing preoccupation passed from making a bridge with the exterior world, or rather, expressing external inputs, as well as assuring that that would be recognized by the actors involved' (Bandeira, 2002: 157). Given the predominance of governmental initiatives in legislative production, the AR has focused its competences on the legitimising mechanisms, mainly in its relations with the public.

Although the nature of the representative mandates in Portugal and Austria is still dominated by the party unit, there have been developments in the last decade of specific institutional mechanisms aiming to promote public engagement, namely through the expansion of means of communication and engagement facilitated by new media (Leston-Bandeira, 2012c; Pollak and Slominski, 2014). Nevertheless, the final outcome is not the same as the one that the descriptive analysis in Chapter IV has shown. Overall, Portugal is offering its citizens more information, communication, multimedia and participative tools and activities than the average parliament, while Austria is below the overall average. In fact, the Austrian parliament is a puzzling case, since it is prioritising engagement with citizens through the supply of participatory tools instead of bilateral interactions through channels of communication and interactive multimedia – in contrast to all other parliaments. What might explain these

[78] The right to petitions has been observed constitutionally in Portugal since its very first constitution in 1822 and has been kept in every new constitution issued since then (Leston-Bandeira and Tibúrcio, 2012).

differences, considering that these two cases share such a great deal of similarities, as shown above? To what extent has their journey towards more public engagement been different or similar?

A longitudinal perspective will unveil the similar or dissimilar patterns between these two cases, as well possible causal mechanisms not considered in the previous analysis (in the QCA) that might intervene between forms of digital communication and political outcomes among parliaments.

7.2.1 Chronological sequence: a window to the past

The case of the Portuguese parliament

The literature has reported that over the last few years, the Portuguese parliament has been establishing a more specific type of representation and a higher level of engagement with citizens through the expansion of means of communication facilitated by new media (Leston-Bandeira and Tibúrcio, 2012). Particularly in the last decade, the Portuguese parliament has been placing an ever-greater emphasis on innovative methods of citizen engagement, especially those enabled by information and communication technology (ICT) as a crucial means of combating the real and present danger of political disengagement (Ribeiro, 2012). However, these developments actually started earlier. In fact, it is possible to summarise these developments over four main periods that represent the history of the Portuguese parliament and ICTs, and consequently in its relationship with citizens mediated by digital tools. All of the crucial moments are illustrated in figure 7.1.

The first period (1996 to 2002) started with the year 1996, when parliament launched its first website simultaneously with other parliaments such as Finland, Germany, Sweden and the UK, which also launched their PWs in the same year.[79] This was mainly pushed by the socialist speaker at that time, António Almeida Santos, who, in the words of the current vice-speaker, 'was extremely important and there is no doubt about that'; in fact, 'with him, many significant steps towards the modernisation of parliament were taken'.

Almeida Santos, former president and honorary president of the Socialist Party (PS), was the former president of the Portuguese parliament between 1995 and 2002 (VII and

[79] Information from the WaybackMachine Internet Archive.

VIII legislatures) – it was during his presidency that the parliament launched its first parliamentary website in 1996 (see figure 7.1). The first website had a handwritten message by António de Almeida Santos welcoming users and hoping that the 'good use of this new medium' would allow 'a closer connection between the parliament and the citizens'. Even at that time, when only 3% of the Portuguese population used the internet, the importance of the relationship between parliaments and citizens had already manifested. The efforts and progress made by Almeida Santos are now taken as a good example of progress; as the current speaker said, 'As with Almeida Santos 20 years ago, the Portuguese parliament should once again lead the process of adapting state institutions to new communication technologies'.

After the implementation of the website, new versions modifying the layout, the contents and the structure were launched afterwards. For instance, in 2002 a small update was undergone to follow the evolution of ICTs and the emergence of new technological trends that allowed the use of images and more detailed graphics, as the current webmaster of the PW mentioned.

Aside from the technological changes, the current vice-speaker also highlighted that a few political changes were important during this period. In particular, 'In 1997, the Portuguese Constitution underwent its 4th revision', which has 'enlarged the participatory tools for citizens and has enriched a few instruments, such as introducing the right to popular legislative initiative [Artº 115., nº2]'. This instrument has gone through some changes over time in order to become more accessible for citizens; in the past, the required number of signatures to submit an initiative was 35 000, but since 2016 it has decreased to 20 000 signatures. Also, since 2018, an electronic platform to submit initiatives and get notifications on their progress has been developed.

The next reform was bigger in volume and perhaps in importance. During the years between 2002 and 2007, the AR started to broadcast its parliamentary sessions live through the 'parliament channel' (in Portuguese 'Canal do parlamento - ARTv'). Since 1993, the AR has had a broadcast television system whose purpose was to fully provide parliamentary debates for internal consumption and distribution. However, the increasing perception of the need to broaden the dissemination of the full scope of parliamentary work, as a result of parliament's growing communication needs and the advent of digital technology, led to the initiation of preliminary studies in 1998 to adapt the system in the future, which was fully realised in 2002 after the governing board of the channel defined a model of distribution and the 'conference leaders' approved it.

As Jose Magalhães – a socialist MP historically known for pushing for modernisation reforms in parliament – recalled, at that time 'thematic channels were prohibited by law and therefore, since parliament wanted to have a broadcast channel, it had to make an exception to the law', which in turn 'paved the way for the revision of the law and the elimination of the ban on thematic channels'. This is also a good example of how, in some cases, progress in these matters implies revisions of the law, which ultimately might slow down progress or constitute a constraint to parliaments' actions in the first place.

Perhaps, and equally important, in 2005 the parliament introduced an electronic system for petitions, following the pioneering Scottish parliament – the first to digitally overhaul this instrument. This represents a digital transformation of an instrument that was already in place and established in the Portuguese Constitution of 1976 (Tibúrcio, 2015). Before that, the average response time was over two years; after the digitalisation of the process, that time changed drastically to 119 days (in 2011–2012)[80] (Ibid). This is a clear indication of the remarkable change introduced by the digitalisation of the petition system. During this period of time, the website was once again subject to new updates: new information and content was offered to the website's users. The main motivation arose again from developments in the ICT area, namely the development and production of internal systems.

Also during this period, another reform took place in 2007 as a partial result of the report 'Reforming and Modernising the AR in order to better serve citizens', issued by a working group from the Socialist Party (Ribeiro, 2012). The guidelines for the reform advocated for an accountable and more transparent parliament that was close to its citizens. The major result from this reform 'was the increasing of the information available on the parliament's website about the parliamentary activity and MPs, together with a range of mechanisms, which aim at creating opportunities for citizens to participate and increase levels of interactivity' (Ibid.: 131).

The third period (2008 to 2015) was mainly characterised by a few layout changes and the introduction of a new content management system – the SharePoint system – which was supposed to empower teamwork with dynamic and productive team sites for every project team, department and division. The main motivation for carrying out the work was to make publicly available information easier to access, more reliable and efficient. Also, it was during

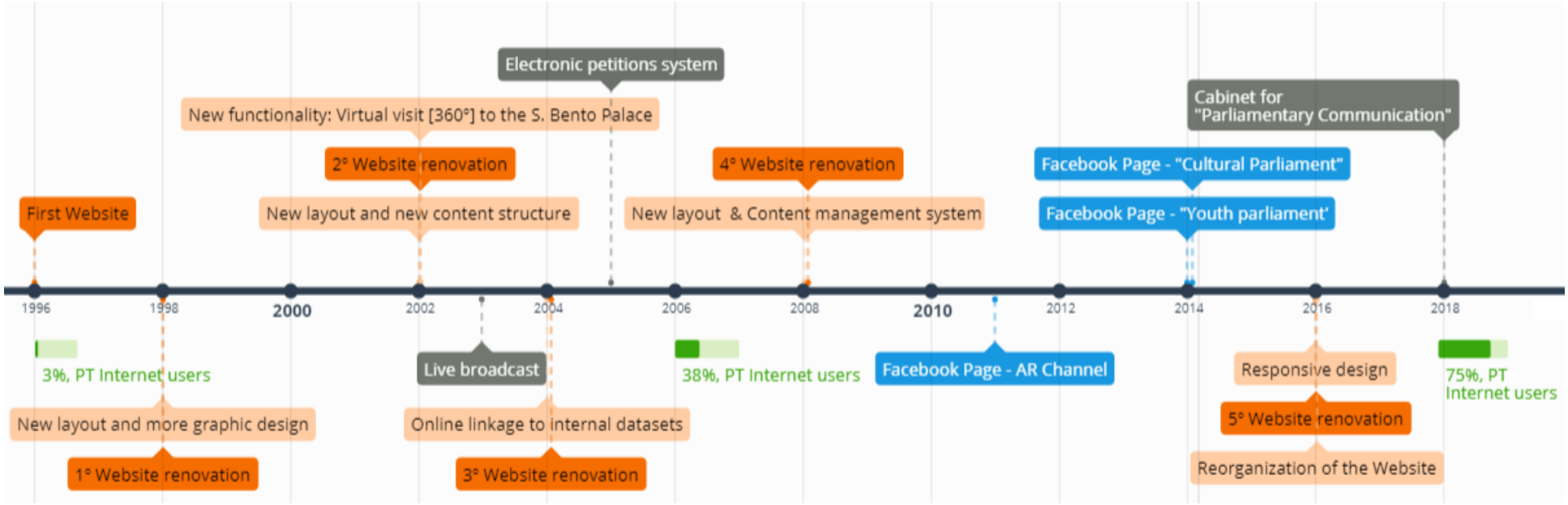
80 Following Tibúrcio, the mere facilitation of an email channel for submitting petitions has considerably increased the number of petitions the Portuguese parliament has received in recent years (Tibúrcio, 2010)

this period that parliament decided to have an official presence on social media. Therefore, three Facebook profiles, namely for the 'youth parliament', the 'cultural parliament' and 'the channel of the parliament', were created. These thematic Facebook pages constitute the first approach of the Portuguese parliament to social media.

Finally, the last relevant period is the current period, which begins with the constitution of the parliamentary working group 'digital parliament' in 2016 issued by the socialist speaker, Eduardo Ferro Rodrigues, and the consequent outputs generated from this group, namely the reorganisation of the entire website and the adoption of graphic and video content. The main motivation behind the latest reform was to make the parliamentary site more attractive, facilitative and transparent for the ordinary citizen. Additionally, the implementation of an office (or division) for 'parliamentary communication', which will have 'the task of ensuring the coordination of the institutional communication of the AR' (GTPD, 2018).[81]

[81] AR resolution n.º 148/2017.

Figure 7.1 Chronology of the key moments of the Portuguese parliament's digitalisation process



The brief chronological analysis provides a much-needed longitudinal perspective on the issue of online public engagement. From this analysis, it becomes clear that in the short history of the AR's politics online, 2016 was a pivotal year. This was the year in which the Portuguese parliament, by the hand of Speaker Eduardo Ferro Rodrigues, sought to make use of web-based software as a means of closing the gap between it and citizens by communicating better and collaborating with the community to increase parliamentary scrutiny and to improve the quality of parliamentary working tools. All of these goals were mentioned for the first time in the speaker' discourse on the celebration of the 42 years since 25 April 1974 (the revolution day that consecrated the Portuguese democracy). The discourse was rooted in the idea that the Portuguese political system needs to change and that together, parliament and politicians need to 'bring the digital revolution to the centre of democracy'. Despite recognising that 'parliament has never had its doors so open to the community as it has today', it is still necessary 'to remove the barriers and continue the unfinished project of perfecting democracy'. Also, the discourse mentioned the need 'to remain a parliament updated to today's world'.

The discourse gains incredible relevance due to the political context around it. After all, the speaker chose to address this issue in the ceremony celebrating 42 years of democracy in Portugal and promised to introduce it in the parliamentary agenda in order to find 'the best solutions to respond to this urgent concern'. The discourse stressed multiple times 'the need for enhancing transparency in the exercising of political mandates' and in 'the way parliament communicate with citizens'; after all, 'the fight for the quality of democracy is, therefore, in this House an urgent, permanent combat, a daily struggle'.[82]

After this discourse, a parliamentary working group ('digital parliament') was created, constituting one MP from each political group represented in the parliament along with parliamentary staff from their own staff cabinets and the directors of the informatics division (CINF), the documentation, information and communication division (DSDIC) and the technical support division (DSATS). The working group was active between June 2016 and March 2018. The results of this initiative are still ongoing, and it is still too soon to make an accurate assessment of its success. Further studies would be needed in order to explore the

82 Discourse of the speaker on 25 April 2016. Source (accessed on 15 February 2019): http://app.parlamento.pt/webutils/docs/doc.pdf?path=6148523063446f764c324679626d56304c334e706447567a4c31684a53556c4d5a576376523046435545465 34c306442516c4242556b467963585670646d3876535735305a584a325a57356a7737566c637938794e5330774e4330794d44453252476c7a593356796332396a5a584a706257397561574666 4d6a5642596e4a70624449774d545a325a6935775a47593d&fich=25-04-2016Discursocerimonia_25Abril2016vf.pdf&Inline=true

ongoing and future developments that resulted from the parliamentary works undergone in this group.

Although some steps have been taken and technological reforms have been made over the past 20 years, overall the institutional framework has not really changed over the years. Nevertheless, the political context and the surroundings around parliament have reinforced the need to adequately use ICTs and have undoubtedly encouraged a more direct relationship between the Portuguese parliament and its citizens. In addition, it has encouraged internal forces that push for innovative parliamentary reforms, and the role of the Socialist Party for the introduction of ICTs to modernise the Portuguese parliament and become more open and close to citizens has become relevant. Next, a closer look at the Austrian parliament will make it possible to compare these two realities over the years.

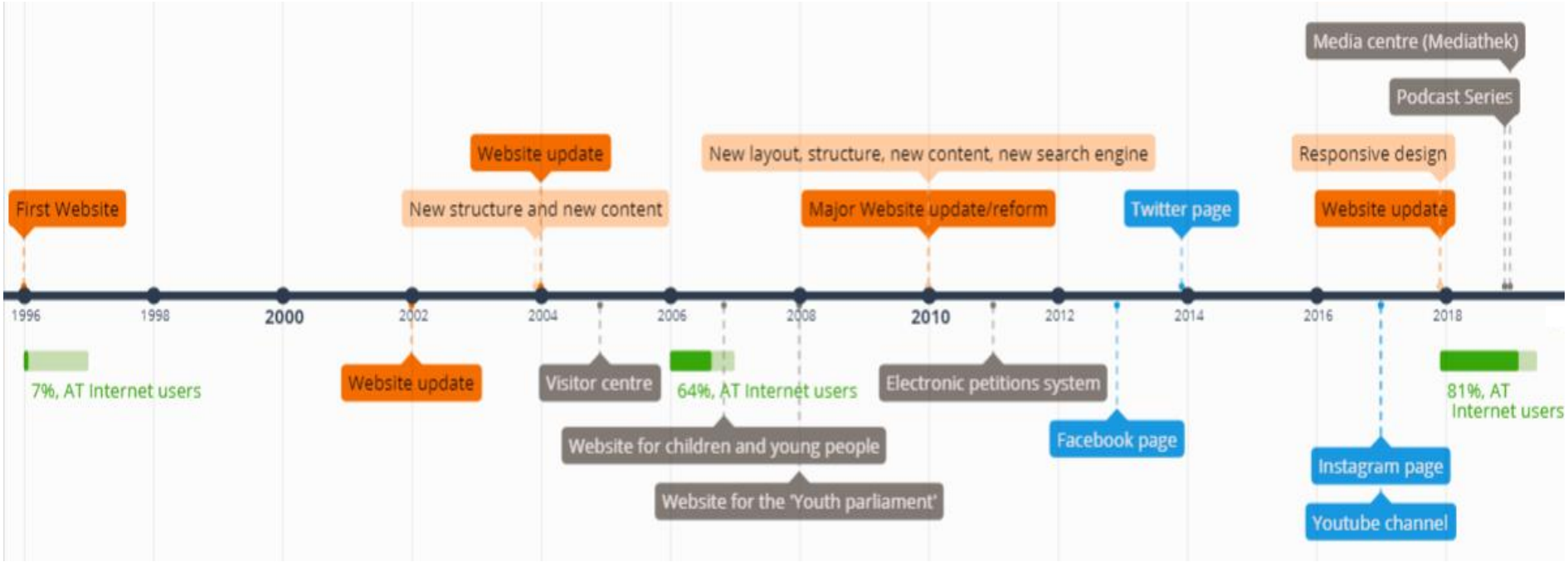
The case of the Austrian parliament

The Austrian parliament launched its first website in the same year as the Portuguese parliament – 1996. Since then, the parliament has made legally and politically important documents and activities, as well as information about individual MPs, publicly available on its website. Similar to the Portuguese case, President of the National Council Dr. Heinz Fischer (1990 to 2002), who was speaker of the Austrian House of Representatives at that time, signed a welcome message to the 'Internet users', explaining that 'via the Internet, you have available, in an economical way, the information you are interested in' and stressing the importance of the Internet by highlighting that with it, the Austrian parliament was 'enabled to fulfil its informational task better than before, i.e. its duty to help the citizens to see behind the development of political objectives by making its deliberations public and its documents accessible'.[83] Contrary to the message of the Portuguese speaker that highlighted the relationship between parliament and citizens, this message clearly underlines the parliamentary function of 'providing information'.

Two major reforms were made since then (see figure 7.2). First, a technical reform was made in 2008, followed by a reform on the content structure and the website design in 2010 – this also included new search engines and a new layout. Before that, the parliamentary website was modernised and relaunched in 2004, a new visitor centre was established in 2005 and a separate website for young people was launched (www.demokratiewebstatt.at) in 2007. Later, this web page targeted at young people started to provide chats with parliamentarians.

[83] Source: Internet Wayback Machine

Figure 7.2 Chronology of the key moments of the Austrian parliament's digitalisation process



At the time of the fieldwork done in Austria, by the end of 2018, the website was undergoing a new overhaul, curiously at the same time as the parliament's physical building, as Karl-Heinz Grundböck – spokesperson of the parliament – recalled. For him, all of this was part of a big renovation that parliament was (and still is) undergoing; therefore, 'it would be a good option to open the building at the same time with the new website'. For the spokesperson of this institution, the website 'needs to be turned around', and he stated that 'we have to address the general public in the first page [homepage]' and 'those who have a certain level of expertise and special interests in the website will find what they are interested in maybe in a second or third step'. The idea is to reorganise the website to simplify the homepage and make the information more accessible and comprehensible to ordinary citizens.

This latest ongoing renovation is part of a wider expansion that the Austrian parliament is developing, which includes providing audio-visual content to its public. Since the fieldwork done in Austria in late 2018, this institution has made progress on its communication strategy. For instance, several improvements took place in 2019: a media centre was launched (Mediathek) in July; a video-on-demand system was launched in the same month, meaning the plenary debates will be available in the house's new media library; and a podcast series and explanatory videos about parliament and parliamentary events was launched in September. The episodes concern several issues, such as the daily life of parliamentary board officials and the national council elections. There is also an animated video about voting rights and democracy.

National Council President Wolfgang Sobotka explained that these recent efforts are necessary to 'address the global developments, such as globalisation and digitalisation' and to that purpose require 'breaking new ground in communications'. This reflects the necessity of parliament 'explaining the institution in a different way and not only in text formats', as the spokesperson for the parliamentary administration, Karl-Heinz Grundböck, explained back in 2018. This reflects the much-needed improvement on communications and multimedia, as was previously shown in Chapter IV – this institution was placed at the bottom of the ranking regarding communication tools and interactive multimedia usage. Despite these recent efforts, committee meetings are still not public; therefore, they are not broadcast or webcast to the public. Notwithstanding the basic advantages of opening up the committee meetings and deliberations, the closed committee process is a significant obstacle to public engagement with real parliamentary work.

Although the parliamentary website has undergone a few major updates over the years, today, head of the strategic media Ines Kerle acknowledged that the 'way the parliamentary

website is organised at the moment [makes] the information hard to find'. However, the usability of the website is not a key issue, or at least nothing has been done consistently – 'unfortunately', as Harald Niederhuber from the IT department lamented. He continued by explaining that 'we are supporting the well-aware user who knows what they're searching for'. This is confirmed by the consultant and lobbyist that was interviewed, Andreas Kovar, who considered the website to be accessible, since for him 'all the information I need I get from there'. Of course, this difference relies on the different audiences parliaments need to reach out to and communicate with – those that understand political jargon and are able to navigate around complex issues, such as researchers, journalists and lobbyists, and those for whom political information is too complex and difficult to follow, such as the ordinary layman citizen.

Also, over the years, the Austrian parliament has followed the trend of digitalising instruments for political participation, such as the petitions system that became electronic in 2011, on one hand, and taking advantage of social media on the other hand. The parliament has been actively present on social networks since 2013, when launched its Facebook page, and expended its presence by implementing Twitter and Instagram profiles in 2014 and 2017, respectively. For this institution 'social media is a complement you need' given the fact that 'the website has lost is relevance in contacting the citizens in the last years, because it's mainly an information supply tool' as Ines Kerle explained. Nevertheless, the website has three full-time staff members working on the maintenance and management of the website, and another five to ten technical staff members and ten delegates from various departments contributing to content.

Overall, the parliament has intensified its relations with the general public over the last decade (Pollak and Slominski, 2014), especially over the last few years. Recently, the Inquiry Committee on Strengthening Democracy in Austria (in German – 'Enquete-Kommission betreffend Stärkung der Demokratie in Österreich') was assembled in September 2014 through the proposal of a group of MPs and lasted for one year through eight sessions. A few years ago, in June 2008, the Working Group on e-democracy and e-participation within the federal chancellery also had the mission of providing a starting point for developing a national eParticipation strategy. Back then, a set of suggestions and recommendations were stated. The goal was not necessarily to install plebiscitary and direct democracy instruments or to compete with the representative model of democracy, but to complement it and to foster civil society participation according the ideal of the 'interactive state' (Aichholzer and Allhutter, 2008). The final report of the working group emphasised the necessity of multiple channels of participation

as complementary tools for formal procedures. In contrast, the committee commissioned in 2014 was more oriented towards the role of direct democracy instruments, as the next section will explain.

7.2.2 From parliamentary websites to social media

The longitudinal perspective has shown that both the Nationalrat and the Assembleia da República (AR) have made efforts to connect with citizens, mainly through their websites and more recently though social media.

Parliamentary websites were the first main windows to the outside world. Indeed, websites have become one of parliaments' most important channels of communication, especially given the continued decline of traditional media coverage (Leston-Bandeira and Ward, 2008; Zittel, 2003). Whilst the audience may still be a minority one and skewed towards the politically interested (Ibid), both parliaments have redesigned and reformed their websites over the years in order to catch up with technological developments and also, to some extent, to answer external demands – including citizens' demands.

Undoubtedly, parliamentary websites as a channel and instrument at parliaments' disposable can perform many functions and purposes, as many interviewees agreed. First, they are useful 'to make parliament known to its citizens by informing on everything that happens in the parliament', which 'helps to build and state an image of the parliament', as one Portuguese official explained. Johannes Pollak shared this belief that through websites, 'parliaments can inform and ensure transparency'. However, even at the simple level of i*nforming*, parliaments need to account for the fact that 'different groups of people have different needs', as Cristoph Konrath from the Austrian parliament explained. Therefore, parliaments need to provide information to the 'heavy users'. For Konrath, this means not only 'parliamentarians and public officials', but also 'the general public, researchers, NGOs, bloggers, etc.' This constitutes a challenge for parliaments that can be even more difficult considering the political culture and traditions of countries. As Konrath explained, the 'long-standing approach in Austria' is 'to assume [citizens have] a certain legal knowledge. We assume people are able to read legal texts and [...] if they can't, then it's their problem, not the problem of the administration'. Although there have been changes, this strong legalistic tradition in Austria is 'reflected in many parts of [the parliament's] website'.

For others, such as Katrin Auel, the purpose of parliamentary websites is not only to inform but also 'to *engage* citizens'. However, Auel is very skeptical about how the Nationalrat effectively engages with their citizens, even though 'they provide excellent information for experts'. Another official of the Portuguese parliament (responsible for the website), also thinks that websites can 'explain how citizens can participate' and 'call for participation – submitting petitions, initiatives or contacting MPs'. Others believe the 'website is more of a back office', since it works as 'a faithful historical archive and library of all of the information concerning parliamentary affairs', while 'today, social media platforms are the front office' since 'they are much more interactive', as a right-wing Portuguese MP highlighted. This is far from being consensual; others consider the website 'the front office of the parliament', as Fernando Marques explained. Today 'where the Internet is so salient in our daily lives, the parliamentary website is the way citizens reach the parliament', in Marques' opinion.

Regardless of how parliamentary actors perceived social media and parliamentary websites, evidence shows that parliaments are in fact blending social media into parliamentary websites – they have become the two main channels of digital engagement (Papaloi et al, 2012; Leston-Bandeira and Bender, 2013). Although social media may provide 'new ways to communicate and engage with the public, consult on legislation, deliver educational resources and promote transparency' (Williamson, 2013: 7), the parliaments that use social media effectively to fulfil these goals are few and far between. Furthermore, there is still a lack of evidence regarding how parliaments perceive social media, how they operate their communication strategies on social media and why they are or are not embracing social networks. After all, where does parliamentary social media fit in terms of the ladders and steps of online public engagement?

Social media, 'the tavern where parliaments should not be'?

In his 2016 discourse on the celebration of 42 years of democracy in Portugal, the Portuguese speaker advocated for the usage of social networks by parliament. Although he acknowledged the existence of risks in doing so (without specifying which ones), in his opinion, social networks 'allow us to approach and communicate better with people, where citizenship is increasingly exercised today'. However, thus far, the Portuguese parliament does not yet have a full social media presence. This is not to say that it has not experimented with social media. For example, it created a cultural events Facebook page to support a specific

public engagement activity[84] in 2011, its parliament TV channel has an active Facebook page[85] and, more recently, the youth parliament also has created active Facebook[86] and Instagram pages.[87]

The final report of the 'digital parliament' group reveals that 'the presence of the AR in social networks has been reinforced in line with best practice in other parliaments'. By reinforcing, it means the 'parliament began to intensify the use of social networks already in place', mostly by 'increasing the visibility of key events taking place in parliament and broadcasting events to the public'. Also, a button to share content directly to social media was included. The interviews revealed that this institution is aware of the need to adopt social media to reinforce communication with the public, especially to 'reach the younger generations', as the former head of DAP explained. Although one official from the IT department stated that the current way forward 'is to create a single [Facebook] page for the AR', because in her perspective 'that's what makes sense', the 'digital parliament group's report does not clarify what should follow this debate regarding the presence of the AR on social media'.

There are a number of reasons why the adoption of social media by the Portuguese parliament has been slow. The key issue is not just the lack of human resources. Of course, with a team of three staff members to support all web-based development and management and without a team to deal specifically with social media, dedicating extra resources to take care of an extra channel of communication is problematic. This might explain the low activity on current social networks, but it does not entirely explain why this institution is 'timidly approaching social media with thematic accounts, such as the "cultural parliament", and not through a full-time presence', as the vice-speaker mentioned. Besides the fact that parliamentary institutions are generally slow in adapting to new technology, meaning that there is traditionally a time lag before parliamentary institutions adopt these effectively (Leston-Bandeira and Bender, 2013), other reasons need to be acknowledged.

First, social media implies an individual voice that parliament does not have. Parliament constitutes a collective of many actors, and unlike politicians who speak for parliament, parliamentary officials need to be neutral. Many issues were raised within the 'digital parliament' group regarding concerns about the 'need to speak with one voice on social media',

84 https://www.facebook.com/ParlamentoCultural/ – accessed on 3 December 2019.
85 https://www.facebook.com/canalparlamento/ – accessed on 3 December 2019.
86 https://www.facebook.com/jovens.parlamento/ – accessed on 3 December 2019.
87 https://www.instagram.com/parlamentodosjovens/ – accessed on 3 December 2019.

as a senior official recalled. This discussion mirrors the overall discussion between cyber optimists and cyber sceptics. As one of Portuguese MP explained, the 'discussion has begun several years ago here in the AR on how parliament would be presented on social networks', and two groups of people emerged: those who were 'very enthusiastic and euphoric about Facebook and Twitter' and 'those that have raised some concerns', especially warning that 'social networks could never replace a presence of the AR on open formats, open technologies and open platforms'. Although the Austrian parliament has surpassed these issues and developed a full social media presence in 2013 with a Facebook page and expanded it in 2014 with Twitter, Harald Niederhuber from the IT department also shared the idea that 'parliament is a collective institution' and therefore 'it has more challenges when it comes to social media'.

Katrin Auel explained that 'parliaments suffer from specific challenges and have specific challenges when it comes to social media, compared to other institutions'. For the political scientist, 'it is a very selective mode of participation' that 'reaches a specific part, the very politically active people', which means there is 'selection bias'. Also, as she explained, the 'anonymity' behind social networks 'is not conducive to a sort of rational, friendly discourse amongst citizens or with parliamentarians'. Additionally, 'when it comes to the citizens, too, [social networks] are still largely seen as leisure activities'; therefore, she doesn't 'know whether the topics that parliaments deal with and the very formalised way they deal with it lend themselves all that well to these media'.

The Portuguese parliament is still proceeding cautiously and carefully, because 'the worst thing would be for the parliament to move on and then have to retreat', as the former head of DAP clarified. The lack of political consensus has also played an important role in explaining this 'timid approach' to social media. As has been previously shown, there has not been a consensus around 'what the presence of parliament on social media should be' among parties, as a Portuguese MP mentioned. There is still a 'difficulty to understand how to do it [the use of social media] and whether [being on social media] does not mislead the institutional image of the parliament'. It seems the Portuguese parliament has not overcome the 'initial idea that social networks are a tavern, and therefore parliament is not supposed to go to the tavern', as Jose Magalhães, MP remembered. For him, this was a 'completely biased idea and a shot in the foot', since 'parliament must be where the people are'. It seems this 'prejudice' towards social networks has not been totally overcome, since this institution continues to experiment with social media without a full commitment.

Nevertheless, to a large extent the two parliaments have joined social media – although to different degrees – because the challenges they are facing require these institutions to engage in a new style of communication beyond the traditional institutional one. Social media is an unavoidable tool of communication in today's society. This does not mean that it has changed much about how parliaments operate or led to substantive engagement. Social media is seen as a 'complementary tool to get a dialogue, to get into a dialogue with the citizens and to make the citizens involved and engaged' as Ines Kerle from the Austrian parliament highlighted. This is more difficult to achieve though parliamentary websites, given their structure. Therefore, social media can be a useful tool not only at the more basic levels of engagement, but also at the more substantive levels.

7.2.3 Recent developments: two 'committees', two different stories?

Recent history of the two cases shows that concerns with the parliament-citizen relationship are increasingly more relevant. Evidence shows that over the last years, both parliaments have created structures of discussion, dialogue and work among parties within parliament in order to 'strengthen democracy' and to 'connect citizens to parliament' by 'using ICTs' (but not exclusively) to pursue those goals. These efforts are motivated by citizens' disenchantment with politics and parliaments. This confirms the 'distrust hypothesis' and demonstrates that citizens' unfavourable attitudes towards politics provide a powerful incentive for parliaments to rethink their digital public engagement strategies.

Although they happened two years apart from each other, both of these structures had similar goals and followed similar procedures; however, the outcomes were different, which will all be analysed in this section. Both parliaments felt the need to address these issues and create a parliamentary structure in the form of an 'inquiry committee' in the case of Austria and a 'working group' in the case of Portugal, to discuss them; however, the starting points, trajectories and results were considerably different.

The Inquiry Committee on Strengthening Democracy in Austria was assembled in September of 2014 through the proposal of a group of MPs and lasted for one year through eight sessions. Around 50 stakeholders, citizens and experts were heard, and eight citizens were summoned to become members of the committee and 'participate in the public sessions and have the right to speak'. Other actors were invited, such as local and regional political actors belonging to the parties with parliamentary seats. A Twitter hashtag was created

(#EKDemokratie) to enable all interested citizens to take part in the discussion online. This was a brand new path for the Austrian parliament, since it does not have a tradition of including citizens in these discussions in parliament (Poier, 2015). By contrast, the 'working group' for 'digital parliament' in the Portuguese parliament was initiated by Speaker of the House Eduardo Ferro Rodrigues during the 25 April 2016[88] discourse on the celebration of 42 years since the revolution of 25 April 1974. The discourse was rooted in the idea that the Portuguese political system needs to change and that together, parliament and politicians need to 'bring the digital revolution to the inside of democracy'. Despite recognising that 'parliament has never had its doors so open to the community as it has today', it is still necessary 'to remove barriers and continue the unfinished project of perfecting democracy' and 'to remain a parliament for this day in age'. The parliamentary group also heard several experts from different areas.

The goals of each one of these structures were considerably different. The Inquiry Committee on Strengthening Democracy in Austria (Enquete-Kommission betreffend Stärkung der Demokratie in Österreich) was commissioned to advise on several subjects, such as further development of direct democracy instruments at the national and local level (in the nine federal states); the interplay between politics, media and citizens; and the political impact expected from these instruments in the national council. The issues of new media and ICTs was discussed, but contrary to the Portuguese parliamentary group, it was not the key focus. Nevertheless, two of the final outputs to increase direct democracy were developed by taking advantage of digital media – this will be presented in detail later. This committee follows a long discussion in Austrian politics regarding direct democracy instruments (and reforms of the electoral law). As MP Nikolaus Scherak recalled, this committee followed a 'big debate on a bill that wanted to expand direct democratic tools in Austria' in the last legislature. The political pressure for such instruments comes from both the citizens and the party landscape – including populist parties, which have always vehemently argued for more direct democracy in Austria (Poier, 2015).

Contrarily, the Portuguese parliamentary group was mainly commissioned to present key innovative guidelines for a 'digital parliament', in order to 'contribute to a reinforcement

[88] Original document can be found at:
http://app.parlamento.pt/webutils/docs/doc.pdf?path=6148523063446f764c324679626d56304c334e706447567a4c31684a53556c4d5a576376523046435545465534c306442516c4242556b467963585670646d3876535735305a584a325a57356a7737566c637938794e5330774e4330794d44453252476c7a593356796332396a5a584a706257397561574666d6a5642596e4a70624449774d545a325a6935775a47593d&fich=25-04-2016Discursocerimonia_25Abril2016vf.pdf&Inline=true

of citizenship and therefore a revival of democracy'. This included a profound discussion of the relationship between parliament and citizens, such as digital instruments of political participation, among others. The discussion was not centred around further direct democracy instruments, but instead focused on the digital transformation of the current political instruments citizens already had at their disposable to participate in the political process. Therefore, the committee recommended the implementation of a new electronic platform within the website of the Portuguese parliament to allow citizens to submit petitions, citizens' legislative initiatives, referendums and popular initiatives and to be notified as the process moves along.

The final guiding principles and recommendations of the committee included strengthening direct democratic instruments at the country and local level; 'strengthening the capacities of parliament' and the working conditions of each MP; and introducing more participatory tools, such as an electronic crowdsourcing platform similar to the Finnish model 'to gather the know-how and experiences of citizens' and an 'extended evaluation process' through which citizens submit comments to ministerial drafts and support existing comments, thus 'strengthening the capacities of parliament' and the working conditions of each MP and 'establishing a better presence in the media' by, for instance, broadcasting the parliamentary committees' sessions.[89]

Some of these recommendations are still ongoing, while others have already been implemented, but the 'big part is not ready at the moment', as Peter Pointer explained. One in particular is of great interest, as previously mentioned in Chapter V – the 'extended assessment procedure' – since it allows citizens to comment on ministerial bill drafts. Since September 2017, Austrian citizens who are 16 or older have the opportunity to submit comments (up to 2 500 characters) on ministerial drafts via the website. This procedure was created by the Resolution of the National Council of 16 May 2017 (200/E) – 'Erweitertes Begutachtungsverfahren'. In addition, citizens can support or agree with the comments already made and published online. Although this was one of the recommendations of the inquiry committee, in fact this tool 'is nothing new but now it is little bit nicer and more accessible', as Ines Kerle explained. In fact, the possibility to submit comments was already implemented, but now 'there is a form to do it and people can support and agree with previous comments'.

[89] Source: https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXV/I/I_00791/fnameorig_468781.html

Although, Nikolaus Scherak believed that 'the possibility to submit comments and support [them] is very important for democracy' and that 'this process helps the members of the parliament, but also the government to make sure that they are actually acting on behalf of the Austrians', he was disappointed with the final result of the committee: 'unfortunately, the governing parties (SPÖ/ÖVP) drew different conclusions from the committee (Enquete) than we did [NEOS party]'. This was also felt by the officials that accompanied the work of this committee. As Cristoph Konrath from the scientific, judicial and legislation division underlined, this 'was the only thing [on which] everyone could agree'.

There were 'diametrical differences of opinion' among parties in the committee, as the report of the opposition parties reveals.[90] Parties 'could not agree on having more direct democracy, they could not agree on having more citizen participation in parliament', as Cristoph Konrath explained. These 'diametrical differences' have resulted in two different final reports, one from the governing parties (a grand coalition between Austria's two largest parties, the SPÖ and ÖVP) and other from the opposition parties (FPÖ, Grüne, NEOS and Team Stronach).[91] MP Nikolaus Scherak's position clearly reflected on the status of the opposition report that 'in the end, the essential reform steps that were discussed during the conference (Enquete) were not part of the adopted legislation'. In his opinion, there are a couple of 'topics still need to be adopted by the Austrian parliament', such as the 'broadcast of the committee meetings', 'more detailed treatment of referendums in the National Council' and the 'introduction of a compulsory school subject on "Political Education"'. All of these are examples of recommendations made by the Inquiry Committee on Strengthening Democracy in Austria that have not yet been implemented, and 'with the current government, it got even worse', in the MP's opinion.

Although Nikolaus Scherak referred to this particular tool as 'positive' and ' definitely [a] good tool for the population to get involved in the legislative process', others are more sceptical and are particularly disappointed with the final result. In the opinion of local political experts, 'It is a waste of time, it is useless. It's window dressing. This is child's play, from my perspective', as Austrian political scientist Johannes Pollak highlighted. Similarly, Andreas Kovar, a lobbyist for parliamentary transparency that contributed to the inquiry

[90] Source: https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXV/UEA/UEA_00511/imfname_470520.pdf

[91] The Austrian election held on 29 September 2013 resulted in a grand coalition between the SPÖ and ÖVP, which secured a combined majority by a tiny margin. Whereas the populist radical right FPÖ was supported by every fifth voter, the Greens achieved moderate gains and two new parties entered the parliament: the populist Team Stronach and the liberal NEOS (Dolezal and Zeglovits, 2014).

committee, also considered that 'It's a joke, the final output', when referring to the option to give a 'thumbs up' to a bill's draft. The idea behind the 'thumbs up' to express citizens' support for a particular bill comes from the 'parliamentarians working on the committee', as Cristoph Konrath recalled. 'They wanted to have something like Facebook or something similar to that dynamic', which in his opinion 'is difficult to implement in a website that has a certain age and has a certain kind of architecture'. Again, parties were not in agreement regarding the design of the tool, even 'when you try to implement something in the architecture of the parliamentary website that is already there', as Cristoph Konrath explained. It is clear that both officials and parliamentarians faced challenges and difficulties during the committee.

Another issue relates to the bills themselves. As Ines Kerle explained, 'we have a consultation mechanism on things not originated at the parliament but originated at ministries. So, it's a black box because we can only store it'. Also, officials reported that there is still a 'lack of clear procedural rules – for instance, for how many weeks should procedures be open', as Cristoph Konrath explained. The same idea was corroborated by Harald Niederhuber from the IT department, who said that the 'standard timeframe is six weeks, but sometimes it is less – it is a very short period of time, just a couple of days, for instance', and for that 'we are often criticised for it'. Neither the resolution nor the information on the Austrian parliamentary website inform the public on the timeframe for which the drafts should be online for citizens to comment on and show support.

Aside from the political and practical challenges in implementing a tool such as the 'extended assessment procedure', there are other challenges regarding the impact of these tools in the society. For instance, Katrin Auel, the Austrian expert on parliamentary affairs, explained that, in her opinion, these tools 'work very well at a local level – at a small, local level – because you can organise things differently' but no so much at 'the national level'. Similarly, Johannes Pollak believed 'the design is made in a way that there is never any danger of citizens having an impact'. Related to that issue, no one could provide a clear answer on how the government is integrating these inputs in the policy process or responding to them effectively. As Harald Niederhuber from the IT team recalled, their job is to 'collect, compile the report and deliver it. What's happening after? I don't know'. As he reinforced multiple times, 'nothing is happening here [in parliament]'.

Similar to the Portuguese case, there was a lack of political consensus on some issues within the committee, which reveals that online public engagement issues are divisive among different political and ideological forces. For instance, in Austria, the opposition parties felt the

need to write a different report expressing their disagreement and disappointment with the outputs and overall work of the committee. Meanwhile in Portugal, the lack of consensus was less evident. Although, as an MP of the 'digital parliament' group (who doesn't want to be identified) explained, there is 'never consensus because the Left-Block and the Communists do not agree with other parties'. He continued explaining that these two parties fear 'the contents will be manipulated', which 'delays any progress because any decision needs a majority vote'. A left-wing MP corroborated the idea that for some issues, such as the editorial programme of the parliamentary TV channel, 'there was no consensus'. Although 'there was consensus around the importance of social media' in the working group, when 'the parties are operationalising it in the Leaders Conference, there is no consensus'. Luis Monteiro, a Portuguese MP from the Left-Block, attributed the lack of consensus in the group 'to the difficulty of understanding how to use social media' on the part of some MPs and 'to the questioning if the usage of social media by parliament is not a de-virtualisation of the institutional image of the parliament'.

The lack of political consensus on how citizens should participate in the political process, how to design these tools, what to allow and what to do with citizens' inputs are good reflections of the many challenges parliaments face when developing strategies of public engagement.

With a better picture of the journeys these two cases have embarked on over the years, it is possible to unveil and discuss the processes and causal mechanisms behind their public and digital engagement strategies, as well as the role of critical actors.

7.3 DEVELOPING (ONLINE) PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT: PROCESSES, MECHANISMS AND CRITICAL ACTORS

7.3.1 The importance of resources

In Chapter VI, the expectation regarding the impact of parliamentary resources was outlined, namely 'parliaments with more resources should have stronger online communication apparatuses than parliaments with fewer resources'. This expectation was based on previous literature (Margolis and Resnick, 2000) and assumes that parliaments are rational systems, which means parliaments calculate the costs and benefits of their communication and choose the communicative tools with the lowest cost or the greatest benefits (Scott, 2003). The QCA

results clearly showed the great relevance of resources when it comes to parliaments' use of the Internet and other ICTs. The interview data collected strongly corroborates this trend. This might not be a novelty result, since literature in the field has shown that 'effective public engagement requires considerable resources and financial investment' (Leston-Bandeira 2014: 432), but the data collected brings new insights to the relevance of resources for the supply of online public engagement. The interviews show that the macro social and political structure and social influences are also important. Parliaments not only consider resources as a piece of the puzzle, but also depend on history, political culture, institutional features and paths already taken to create a response.

Resources: more staff or more money?

A common result in both cases is the idea that 'resources are finite',[92] 'resources are limited and scarce',[93] 'parliaments have tightly allocated resources'[94] and 'parliaments are chronically underfunded'.[95] As one Portuguese expert on parliamentary affairs highlighted, 'the Portuguese parliament has a lack of resources compared to other cases'. Besides, 'the few [resources] they have are sucked up by the parties'. Since the Portuguese parliament is already running with 'low resources' and the few they have 'they use to hire officials to supplement other functions, such as people with a legal background', he does not believe 'the parliament can afford to hire five or six communications staff'. This means, in the opinion of David Crisóstomo, that parliaments 'make a decision on where to spend time and resources' accordingly what 'they perceived is most necessary'. This corroborates the idea that parliaments, as political organisations, calculate the costs and benefits of their communication and choose the communicative tools with the lowest cost or the greatest benefits (Scott, 2003).

This seems to be reason why the Austrian parliament does not provide video content (up until September of 2019). As Barbara Blumer explained, 'the parliament has to follow accessibility guidelines, which are a big challenge, because the parliament would be obliged to provide subtitles', and as she acknowledged, 'the parliament doesn't have the necessary resources to do it'. An external perspective from a local expert considered that the lack of supply of communicative and interactive multimedia in the Austrian parliamentary website is

92 David Crisóstomo – Head of 'Hemiciclo', a PMO in Portugal.
93 Former head of the DAP.
94 Portuguese expert on parliamentary affairs.
95 Katrin Auel – Austrian expert on parliamentary affairs.

because 'the Austrian parties already take over that function'. As he continued to explain, 'the Austrian parties are basically the parliament', which means that 'everything that is decided in Austria is actually more or less already agreed upon outside parliament between different committees which are staffed by people from the political parties'. Therefore, 'communication probably happens outside of the parliament', and he believed parties would 'unwelcome that competition'.

Contrarily, Katrin Auel referred to a mix of different reasons. First, institutional reasons, given the fact that 'the parliament dos not broadcast the parliamentary committees', which 'are not open for the public'. Although, parliamentary committees are not open to the public, parliament does provide a 'short summary of what has happened in the committee, which gives you a quick overview of the topic'. She believed these 'are very useful'. The second reason is 'parliamentary traditions and cultures'. As she explained, 'there's more restrained in Austria in terms of engaging with citizens and opening up'. Third, there is a lack resources, which explains why parliament has followed an approach of supplying a great deal of information, because it 'is also easier and less resource intensive'. Auel believed that 'intensifying that cost against possibly sort of restraint that comes from the parliamentarians themselves is difficult'.

In the Portuguese parliament, the broadcast and webcast operations are currently undergoing an improvement, as Joao Amaral, the head of the new office of communications of the Portuguese parliament, explained: 'to fulfil one of the final recommendations of the "digital parliament" working group, namely to equip every committee room with cameras to broadcast all committee meetings' will imply an 'investment of 1.5 million Euros', which in his opinion 'is no easy task'. This is a great example of how financial and human resources are intrinsically connected, because he continued by saying that 'none of that matters if we do not have people to operate those cameras and the broadcast operation'. Human resources are important for the maintenance of the operation and for future operations and activities as well. However, investing in human resources 'is what takes more time, because it requires a process of recruitment and formation', as João Amaral explained. This is an interesting insight that views time simultaneously as a resource and a challenge, which will be further developed in the following paragraphs.

As has been shown, resources matter greatly, but there are 'other types of resources' that parliaments need that 'do not exist within the parliament', as one Portuguese MP stressed. For him, the Portuguese parliament should 'take advantage of artificial intelligence and

chatbots that can facilitate the communication with citizens' by 'partnering with Google, for instance, or other enterprises that would like to implement a pilot study with the Portuguese parliament'. Outsourcing may be a solution for technologically advanced systems and operations that are outside of the realm of parliamentary staff, however specialised they may be. Moreover, realising the lack of resources 'is essential to move forward', as one MP explained. Therefore, the new office of communications 'needs to have a clear mission and the adequate resources and budget', in his opinion.

Similar to the qualitative comparative analysis performed in the previous chapter, the evidence from multiple case studies also corroborates that both financial and human resources are incredibly important, and – most importantly – they are interdependent.

Time as a resource and a challenge

A current issue that appeared in the interviews is 'time' – namely the lack of time required to implement some of the strategies. As one of the Portuguese senior officials mentioned, 'there has been neither time nor resources', which was also mentioned by one of the Austrian senior officials: 'we are investigating and doing our research in a very small amount of time'. The time needed to achieve political consensus and get politicians on board with new ideas, particularly the more innovative and status-quo defiant, can be quite extensive. For instance, Ines Kerle, head of the Austrian' parliament communications office, gave us the perfect example of how the reluctant attitudes of some politicians slows down the process. When her office approached management with the need to advance towards 'mobile optimisation', it took 'five or six years' to get everyone on board. Again, she stressed that 'everything takes a lot of time'.

The slow pace of parliaments in introducing changes does not match with the fast rhythm of the internet era. Although parliaments are 'going faster and faster', it is always difficult to catch up. As the Portuguese official responsible for the new communications office mentioned, 'we are going faster and faster'.

Time must be a concern for parliaments, not only in terms of the time necessary to implement innovations and parliamentary changes, the time needed to achieve political consensus or the fast pace of the internet era, but also in terms of the 'lack of time of citizens', since 'they don't have time to go really through it [on the parliamentary website]', as Ines Kerle

stated. This also must be something to consider when developing parliamentary websites or other instrument for citizens.

7.3.2 The relevance of actors: technical or political?

Although resources matter, this does not explain the whole picture. For instance, the Austrian parliament has a larger budget than the Portuguese parliament, even though it has two chambers to manage (see Table D1 in Appendix D). Austria is a high-income parliamentary democracy while Portugal has had, historically and also recently, widely-known serious financial troubles. Nevertheless, they have different outcomes when it comes to online parliamentary activities and tools promoting public engagement. This corroborates the initial assumption, based on previous literature, that although organisational and bureaucratic features of parliaments are important, there are other mechanisms intervening that need to be considered, about which little is still known. This is particularly because parliaments, as institutions inhabited with their own 'ways of doing things', make it difficult to launch and sustain parliamentary reforms or innovations of any kind, and this is especially true for those that advocate for more radical participatory mechanisms. (Kelso, 2007; Seo, 2017).

Therefore, critical actors with the capacity to lead coherent and effective reforms and political will are important things to be considered in this puzzle. These actors might be parliamentary officials or key political figures in parliament. For instance, the information and communication duties of the Austrian parliament are mainly carried out by the parliamentary administration. While the main task of this body is to support day-to-day parliamentary activities, it also provides a number of information and communication activities for the general public (Pollak and Slominski, 2014). Nevertheless, MPs are still involved in the development and approval of some activities and tools, and they are incredible pushing forces to launch and sustain key parliamentary reforms on these matters, as it will be shown in the following section.

The role of officials in the supply of public engagement.

Leston-Bandeira's body of work on public engagement has indicated the important role played by parliamentary officials regarding the promotion and implementation of institutional public engagement strategies over time. This thesis contributes to this discussion and the broader rediscovery of parliamentary staff as actors in their own right in legislative studies by providing insights on the roles played by officials, which have clearly received scarce attention

in this field. The focus is on parliamentary staff, which consists of civil servants employed by the parliament as a whole instead of political staff recruited through party channels.

The relevance of parliamentary officials was salient in the last digital reform of the Portuguese parliament in 2016. In the short history of the Portuguese parliament's online politics, 2016 was a pivotal year. The Portuguese parliament, through the hand of Speaker Eduardo Ferro Rodrigues, created a working group constituted of MPs and key officials to initiate digital reform and start an institutionalised process of online engagement activities and features. The speaker created a working group with 'the mission of elaborating recommendations for improving the quality of Portuguese democracy through new technologies'. The group was developed with similar features to a parliamentary committee – with an MP from each party represented. However, the novelty was the inclusion of key officials in the group. When asked about the idea to gather both staff and MPs, Vice Speaker Jorge Lacão described this collaboration as 'virtuous' and 'stimulating'. For MPs, this was 'completely innovative'. All interviewees stated the importance of including staff in the 'conversation'. As one MP mentioned, 'sometimes, MPs end up having theoretical dialogues on these topics', which in this MP's opinion is 'unfruitful' and can be solved by bringing parliamentary officials into the discussion, since 'together, in a logic of co-production, we can get around the challenges and difficulties of these matters in real life'. The MP continued, saying these matters influence the day-to-day work of these people and therefore if 'they felt they are not part of the solution or are not motivated, they would not contribute in the same way'.

The inclusion of officials in this working group is a perfect example of the importance that officials have in these matters. In fact, the interviews undergone in this project provide a catalogue of different roles that parliamentary administration performs regarding public engagement activities and strategies.

While officials' work is certainly relevant for policy output, politicians remain in control of their work portfolio. This supports a cautious understanding of the autonomy and influence of bureaucracy (Winzen, 2011). Nevertheless, it is possible to differentiate two types of roles played by officials. On the one hand, they implement the public engagement policy through the daily management of a set of activities and tools of public engagement. On the other hand, they also deal with the substantive content on the policy process, primarily though providing information and expertise on the matter. This, of course, can take on different shapes, forms and magnitude.

The practical contribution of officials is to deliver basic administrative services such as updating the website, managing the legislative datasets on the website, managing social networks, reply to citizens though existing channels, receiving and preparing the petitions sent by citizens and many other important practical tasks. Without these functions, parliaments could not deliver any sort of public engagement activities to their citizens.

The substantive contribution of officials – that is, the way they contribute to the shape of the strategies of public engagement in place – relates to the acquisition, preparation and distribution of information to various actors in the policy process (Winzen, 2011). The work of officials goes beyond merely managing the information on the website each day, for instance. They identify possible routes and practices, as well as contested points and priorities that can be addressed. This gives them the potential to shape the debate on public engagement, the strategies in place and those that are planned. For instance, the development of an Instagram account for the 'youth parliament' comes 'from the administration', as one Portuguese MP recalled. Also, on the board of the TV channel of the parliament, 'the officials' participation is not exclusively to assure that the meetings go well; they also contribute to the meetings'.

Although officials contribute substantively – to a degree – to the public engagement strategies in place or to future ones, 'a communication strategy always has to be approved by the "political side", as one senior official of the Portuguese parliament mentioned. Moreover, 'administrative services can propose ideas but, obviously, there needs to be political validation and involvement', as the aforementioned official elaborated. Of course, the influence of officials does not determine the final strategy of public engagement.

Although officials are extremely important and have multiple contributions, it is common to all of the interviews that one of the main challenges they currently face concerns the involvement of politicians on these matters. As one senior official of the Austrian parliament so clearly stated, 'political commitment cannot be substituted by civil servants'. He continued by saying that 'all participatory approaches, consultation practices and activities involving citizens need a certain political commitment behind it'. A Portuguese official stated the same idea when asked about the responsibilities of the officials and the politicians on these issues of public engagement: 'the political will is extremely important and fundamental in parliament; it is the "clique", it is pushing the button and saying "go on"'. However, in his opinion, it is important to have a balance between those that operate and those that make the final decision. After all, 'if there are no resources, nothing will advance' said the aforementioned official. As seen in the QCA, resources matter greatly. The parliamentary staff

needs to have the capacity to respond to the challenges raised by the 'political side', i.e. by politicians.

The insights from multiple case studies have shown that parliamentary staff not only intermediate between scientific and technical knowledge and interests, strategies and politician preferences, but also have roles that are not always purely confined to administrative tasks, but rather are essentially political (Romzek, 2000).

Technical or political? The role of parties and parliamentarians

Although officials play an important role, it is also clear from the interviews that nothing completely changes in parliaments' approach to digital media or in their relationships with citizens without the final approval of parties (and parliamentarians). As the Portuguese MP José Magalhães stressed, 'we cannot expect that the officials will just hand us the technological and political solutions to a problem that is first and foremost political'. Or, as Barbara Blumer mentioned, 'it's also the task of the political parties to interact with the citizens'. She went even further by stressing that 'it's their job description', which in her opinion 'they could do a little bit more on their own websites'. In fact, although parties are experiencing hard times and their representative functions do not work as they used to (Mair 2013), they to some extent continue to perform several important functions in democracies. They still serve to 'integrate and, if necessary, to mobilize the citizenry; to articulate and aggregate interests, and then to translate these into public policy' (Mair, 2013: 203), among other functions. Even if they are no longer the only vehicles of citizens' representation, parties remain critical actors in democratic politics.

However, sometimes, parties and parliamentarians can be conservative forces resisting further changes. Many political actors show some reluctance to respond to questions, engage in interactive online communications or have discussions with the electorate (Baxter et al., 2011), even though the Internet facilitates direct communication between leaders and ordinary members (Heidar and Saglie, 2003). For instance, as Cristoph Konrath stated, even 'political parties that make very strong use of social media, like the Freedom Party and those that have mastered social media long before others […] when it comes to citizen participation in parliaments and using new electronic means, they are very reluctant'. One might expect that parties that are taking advantage of the opportunities offered by innovative technologies and have begun to use them to achieve their goals would also push for a 'technological revolution'

within parliaments. However, that is not the case. Parties are very cautions when allowing citizens, or even members, to discuss and participate in political issues (Nixon et al., 2003), and this seems to be translated in parliament when new ways to engage with citizens though ICTs are being discussed.

Some of this reluctance may be explained by what Austrian MP Nikolaus Scherak mentioned as 'the social media trap'. In his opinion, since parliamentarians 'express themselves 24/7 […] they have to be very careful with what they post'. He continued by saying that 'many politicians have already fallen into the social media trap and had to resign due to ill-considered statements'. The same issue seems to be shared among Portuguese parliamentarians. They all seemed to acknowledge the advantages of digital media, but at the same time they were reluctant about their potential and showed caution when using them. Another possible explanation is that some political actors may 'resist' because 'they believe that's not the role of parliament', as one Portuguese MP explained. For these politicians, the role of engaging with citizens 'is a responsibility for each MP and for the parties and is not the role of parliament'.

Additionally, in some cases, parties (and parliamentarians) can even be 'backwards forces', as Barbara Blumer revealed. For instance, 'sometimes political parties have strange ideas like abolishing the petition system', because in their opinion 'citizens already have the Citizen Initiative, so they would not need the parliamentary petition anymore'. Barbara had to explain how different these two instruments are and how important they are because of those differences. However, this does not seem to represent the overall approach of the MPs interviewed for this project. Although, some seemed more reluctant or cautions than others, they all seemed to clearly acknowledge that the way forward from now on is further citizen involvement. As one Austrian MP underlined, 'the more possibilities to participate, the better'.

Overall, parliamentarians acknowledged the importance of new technologies to their mandates, especially in terms of accountability. As one Portuguese MP mentioned, 'without new technologies, the fulfilment of the political mandate would not be accountable' (BD). Nevertheless, politicians notoriously consider the Internet a 'Swiss army knife of political communication' as Lachapelle and Maarek (2015: 175) highlighted. Regardless of the 'predisposition' of MPs to digital media, they also need to be included along the several steps and process behind strategies of public engagement being developed by parliaments in order to achieve successful parliamentary reforms. Ultimately, the success of any new strategy or activity will depend on their participation from the beginning. For instance, one Portuguese

parliamentarian remembers that 'at some point [in the past], the parliament developed a blog feature within the parliamentary website, but it never was used by MPs'. For this MP, a balance needs to be achieved – a balance between the 'two dimensions of parliament', the 'administrative dimensions performed by the staff' and the 'representative dimension of parliament that is assured by the MPs'. This is 'fundamental' in his opinion, and for that reason the mix of MPs and staff in the parliamentary working group on the 'digital parliament' in the Portuguese parliament was a success.

Once the great importance of political parties has been acknowledged, it becomes clear that parties as political actors with different ideologies and mandates often do not reach consensus on these matters. This is especially important for issues that are still uncertain, new and innovative such direct democracy instruments or social media. For instance, there were 'diametrical differences of opinion' among parties in the Austrian committee regarding direct democracy instruments: 'parties could not agree on having more citizen participation in parliament', as Cristoph Konrath explained. Another example regarding social media was: 'what should the presence of parliament be on social media'? There is 'no consensus' among the Portuguese parties, as several MPs reported. One of the parliamentarian members of the 'digital parliament' group considered this to be complete 'nonsense' and attributed this as the main reason behind the 'shy presence of the Portuguese parliament on social networks'. It seems there is a 'difficulty in understanding how to do it [the use of social media] and whether [being on social media] does not mislead the institutional image of the parliament', as other parliamentarian highlighted. Although social media is not unifying, public engagement activities overall 'is a topic relatively consensual to reaching a political agreement' as the former head of DAP explained. As she elaborated regarding the 'digital transformation of the parliaments, it is relatively easy to reach an agreement, because all parties advocate a close connection to the citizens and acknowledge the crucial role ICTs have in building that connection'.

Critical actors and political will

While the new institutionalism is great for explaining the endurance of parliamentary institutions, a noticeable missing element of the approach is a purposive role for agency (Bell, 2011). So, other approaches have focused their analysis of change on parliamentary actors. As

was shown above, actors – political and otherwise – are extremely relevant for understanding how institutional change occurs (Norton, 1983; Power, 2007).

For instance, Norton posits a 'change of attitude' by MPs as a 'necessary albeit not sufficient' condition for parliamentary reform (Norton, 1983: 60). The so-called Norton view does not reject structural changes 'but argues rather that an attitudinal change is a prerequisite to effective structural and procedural change' (Ibid: 61). Political will is crucial, because MPs already possess all the powers necessary for change (Cowley, 2002; Norton, 1980). Thus, this political will can also be used to effect change in the chamber, if MPs desire it (Norton, 1983).

Similarly, Power (2007: 493) argues that if parliamentary reform is to happen, it has to be driven by the leader of the chamber. His analysis of the reforms to the UK House of Commons between 2011 and 2005 revolves mainly around the critical importance of the leader and his relationship to other actors in the House. This is borrowed from the importance attributed to 'critical actors' in gender literature in achieving parliamentary change to make institutions more accessible and increase the focus on women's issues (Childs and Krook, 2009). Critical actors in that context are 'those who act individually or collectively to bring about women-friendly policy change' (Childs and Krook, 2009: 127).

The umbrella term 'critical actors' encompasses a range of types of actors concerned with specific issues. In the case of online public engagement, questions like 'who initiates proposals on public engagement' can help pinpoint the individuals and groups that mobilise to place citizens' engagement issues and concerns on the parliamentary agenda (Chaney, 2012).

In fact, the key moments of each parliament's journey towards a bigger digital presence have clearly shown the impact of a handful of critical actors pushing for changes regarding the way the parliament uses ICTs and the way it communicates and engages with its citizens. Pushing through even the simplest reform involves several layers of consultation inside and outside the parliament, and it often means battling on several fronts at once (Power, 2007). It requires firstly a willingness to take on the vested interests. As José Magalhães, a long-time MP fighting for these issues stressed, 'I would say that above all, it is a matter of political will […] there has to be an assumed political will' for anything to go further. David Crisóstomo, responsible for a parliamentary monitoring organisation (PMO) in Portugal, had 'no doubt that there was indeed a lack of leadership in the past'. He believed it stemmed 'not only from the parliamentarians themselves but also from the structure [of parliament] itself'. For him, further progress will not made because of 'lack of resources' but instead because of 'lack of political will'.

If this is true, political will requires a set of core conditions that are necessary to actually lead to any reform. These conditions are: a window of opportunity (after elections, for instance), a reform agenda (MPs may favour change, but they need a coherent set of proposals to unite behind) and finally leadership (this may come from the backbenches, but it may also come from the leader of the house or a combination of both) (Norton, 2000). Power has added two other conditions necessary for reform. The first is the character of the leader of the chamber and the second is the political context within which they operate. Leadership seems to be extremely important, especially the leader of the House, i.e. the speaker. The case studies have shown evidence of how speakers in both countries have pushed for reforms over the years, starting with the first parliamentary websites to the most recent innovations. For instance, in Austria, Heinz Fischer, President (speaker) of the National Council between 1990 and 2002 'was very open minded' and 'tried to open up the parliament as a building and as an institution, and since then we have a website, modern art in parliament and other things', as Ines Kerle stated. The same can be stated for the speakers of the Portuguese parliament – they have had an important role in introducing parliamentary changes in the way parliament connects to its citizens.

However, other scholars have argued that the Norton view is not sufficient to explain parliamentary reform, and that this perspective is unable to explain the lack of reform when those conditions were met. For instance, importance is attached to the political party in the organisation of parliamentary and political life. As Wright (2004: 871), suggests: 'there is no "voice of Parliament" that can be collectively orchestrated. Parliament is a place where the parties do permanent battle, and this fundamental reality trumps attempts to build up Parliament itself'. Similarly, some of the interviewees identified this as a problem. As the former head of DAP stated, 'the problem with the parliament is that it is very difficult to have a communication strategy and to speak as one voice only'. The head of the recently developed office of communications also highlighted the 'difficulty to coordinate eight different voices into one path'. Similarly, Katrin Auel, the expert on Austrian politics, also reflected on this issue. Since parliament is a collective institution, it 'has to be politically neutral', which makes it 'more difficult as institution to mobilise, to appeal to people's emotions'. She used a quote from Simon Hix to explore this idea: 'Simon Hix […] once said that politics is basically a soap opera

full of exciting and vibrant and sometimes boring people[96]. We have our heroes and we have our villains […] because it's something you care about. But parliament can't do that – it can't take part in the fight. It has to be the neutral arena in which that fight takes place. Therefore, for parliaments as an institution gets even more difficult'

Even though political will and critical actors with the capacity to lead coherent and effective reforms are incredibly relevant, there are several challenges parliaments still face that might constrain their actions and strategies regarding public engagement. For instance, as has been shown, parliaments are likely to lack an 'identity as a holistic institution', which can make it difficult for the public to feel a meaningful connection with them. Additionally, as parliaments are inhabited with their own 'ways of doing things', parliamentary reforms or innovations may not be easy to launch and sustain (Seo, 2017), even when key politically motivated actors push for them.

Institutions as (constraining) fields of action

Whatever the purpose, changing the way parliaments interact and connect to citizens is not easy to achieve, since parliaments are usually old and traditional institutions with their own working methods developed over time in unique political contexts. Indeed, it would be a serious mistake to downplay the importance of institutions as we study the relevance of critical actors (and political will).

Parliamentary actors are embedded in complex institutional environments. Of course, institutions are formed and changed by individuals, just as individuals are shaped and constrained by institutions (Hollingsworth, 2000). In addition, political will requires a set of core conditions that are necessary to actually lead to any change (Norton, 2000), and there are institutionalised constraints such as electoral laws, the constitutional law and the nature and culture of the political system, even when key actors are politically motivated to push for changes.

The Austrian case perfectly illustrates why political will is not always enough and how parliamentary actors can be constrained by institutional arrangements and political culture and traditions. First, while consensus politics prevailed until 1986 in Austria, the populist turn of

[96] The original quote is 'Politics is ultimately a glorified "soap opera", with weekly instalments of confrontations and intrigues between vibrant (or sometimes dull!) personalities' (Hix and Bartolini, 2008).

the FPÖ and the entry of the Greens in that year led to a considerable increase of conflict, making it more difficult to achieve consensus among parties in several matters and to challenge the status quo since then (Sieberer et al., 2011). Indeed, this was one of the main challenges of the Inquiry Committee for Strengthening Democracy back in 2014, as the MP from NEOS explained. This also explains how the status quo has prevailed over the years: a majority faced with a favourable status quo has little to gain from any changes (Sieberer and Muller, 2015).

Second, although much of the work of parliament is now carried on in committees (Fasone & Lupo 2015), deliberations in committees are not open to the public (and therefore are not broadcast) in Austria. Of course, there are advantages of closed meetings: they allow the confidential exchange of information, which in turn facilitates more informed decision-making (Ibid.). However, the reliance on closed negotiations with the 'usual suspects' may undermine parliament's legitimacy when they dominate access to parliament at the expense of ordinary citizens (Norton, 1999). For this reason, committees may expand the scope of legislative consultation by involving a more diverse array of actors and enhancing legislative engagement with the public (Seo, 2017). This tradition reflects a lack of an 'open debate culture' in Austrian parliamentary politics. As Austrian political scientist Johannes Pollak explained, 'citizens in this country are used to the fact that their opinion doesn't count, other than at the ballot box'. Taken together, these constraining forces explain why the Nationalrat has been slowly changing its relationship with citizens and why further improvements have not taken place, even though the political will from key parliamentary actors is present.

Portuguese parliamentary actors also face institutional constraints of course,[97] but it seems they have managed to achieve political consensus in key moments, at least regarding the main strategy of public/digital engagement to implement. For instance, MP José Magalhães recalled that in 1996, the 'constitution of a technological base to improve the parliament-citizen relationship began after a new political cycle', stressing the importance that the 'political majority [of PS] gained from the 1995 election' which enabled it 'to conceive the project based on an extended consensus'. This consensus made possible the implementation of a parliamentary website and the establishment of emails contacts for MPs back in 1996, when only 3% of the population had Internet access. Similarly, but more recently, the role of the vice-speaker of the parliament, Jorge Lacão, 'was instrumental for achieving a good cooperation among MPs [in the "digital parliament" group] and getting the final outcome', as

[97] For instance, as was shown earlier, there is no consensus among parliaments regarding the presence of the parliament in social media.

one senior official reported. Nevertheless, further developments such as democratic innovations or a full presence in social media are still far from being consensual among Portuguese parties, which seem to prefer the maintenance of the status quo when it comes to decisions that might challenge their status quo.

In conclusion, past events, foregoing decisions, initial policy choices, institutionalised commitments, parliamentary traditions and political culture are examples of institutional arrangements that constrain parliamentary actors in their pursuit of changes in the way parliaments interact and connect with citizens.

7.3.3 Learning mechanisms: learning from others?

Learning mechanisms: inter-parliamentary cooperation

A recurring idea for reducing the challenges and uncertainty parliaments face when implementing strategies to engage with their citizens has been the role of inter-parliamentary cooperation (IPC). Various networks and organisations have been established over the years with the main goal of promoting a network of collaboration among parliaments. Parliamentary associations such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and the International Association of French-Speaking Parliamentarians provide regular opportunities for such meetings, both internationally and regionally. Among other institutions serving as forums for international consultation and discussion between parliamentarians are the Council of Europe and the Western European Union (Laundy 1989). Several forms of multilateral and bilateral parliamentary meetings have taken place through these networks over the last decades (Griglio and Lupo, 2018).

Another relevant source of inter-parliamentary cooperation is the GCIP, a joint initiative of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and a group of national and regional parliaments, which 'is a centre that plays an active and important role in the worldwide diffusion of e-parliament' (Sobaci, 2012 : 56). The initiative's foundation was laid at the World Summit on the Information Society in Tunisia in 2005 and tries to encourage the usage of ICT as a means to modernise parliamentary processes; increase transparency, accountability and participation; and improve cooperation among parliaments. The matters discussed at their meetings relate to parliamentary practice, administration and problems or issues of common concern to those who serve parliaments. These meetings between professional practitioners have led to a sense of fraternity amongst

them, transcending differing political ideologies and conflicts between nations. Their value could 'hardly be exaggerated' (Laundy, 1989: 126–28).

The European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD), first established at the request of the Speakers of European Parliamentary Assemblies in June 1977, has built a community of parliamentary knowledge that has become a useful tool for inter-parliamentary cooperation and information exchange for different issues, including public engagement and ICTs. Fernando Pereira, Head of the Division of Parliamentary and Legislative Information (in Portuguese 'Divisão de Informação Legislativa e Parlamentar, DILP), described CERDP as 'an extremely important network for parliamentary work'. This is especially true in his division, given that the network also provides a good source of information, 'for other services'. Fernando Pereira continued by saying that the ECPRD network 'is used to search if something has already been done in order to gather cues and routes of research'. Another (former) head of a parliamentary division also mentioned how important ECPRD was within the working group dealing with the digital reform of the Portuguese parliament. The platform offered an opportunity to 'engage and contact other parliaments that belong to the network and ask them how they use technologies to engage with citizens'. The working group seeks advice and examples not only within the network, but also outside of it by searching for examples from the Brazilian parliament, which is one of the most innovative parliaments regarding the use of ICTs. However, the aforementioned official did not believe the collaboration fostered by this network helps parliaments to approach ICTs. She believed 'it is a great instrument' but an 'instrument to collect information'. The pushing force must be 'political', she reinforced.

The intensification of bi-lateral and especially multi-lateral relations amongst parliaments has represented one of the main responses to challenges of globalisation developed by parliamentary assemblies (Griglio and Lupo, 2018). Over the last three decades, these experiences have grown in number and significance (de Vrieze 2015). The rise of these international parliamentary relations can be framed within 'transnational parliamentarism' (Raube and Fonck, 2018), whose main manifestation lies in the creation of international parliamentary institutions (IPIs), which are regular forums for multilateral deliberations that are either attached to an international organisation or constituting one themselves, and in which at least three states or trans-governmental units are represented (Cutler 2006: 83).

Frequently, literature on 'transnational parliamentarism' has widely identified the tools and procedures used to carry out the fundamental strategies that characterise inter-

parliamentary relations. However, most of them only reflect the cooperation among parliamentarians, speakers and committees for foreign affairs (Baiocchi 2005), while few have devoted time to understanding administrative cooperation, i.e. cooperation among parliamentary officials. (e.g. Martinico 2016).

As happens with parliamentarians, parliamentary staff derive great benefits from conferences, seminars and symposia of the kind described above. As one senior Portuguese official described, the 'CERDP organises annual seminars, and all parliaments are invented to participate'. The last one she attended was hosted by the German parliament on the procedures to welcome new MPs.

Those responsible for the website of the Portuguese parliament exemplified the importance of 'learning from others' in these matters: 'we looked at the MPs' websites, institutional websites and other international parliamentary organisation's websites'. The same was true for social networks. For social media, the Portuguese parliament submitted a survey in the ECPRD platform to get a better picture of how other parliaments were using social media at the time. Again, the ECPRD network in particular revealed itself to be fundamental in the implementation of online public engagement activities within parliaments. The final report of the Austrian inquiry committee also reveals extensive knowledge of other examples of practices around Europe. Cases such as Croatia and Finland were used as examples during the inquiry committee.

Inter-parliamentary networks provide a framework for sharing knowledge, coordinating actions, providing technical assistance and pooling information and resources across parliaments around the world, regardless of a country's economic development level (Sobaci, 2012). As Rogers so eloquently said, 'networks are the invisible routes through which individuals make things happen' (Rogers, 2003: 294). In fact, the power of these networks and these learning mechanisms through the collaboration and dialogue with other parliaments now seems clear.

Looking at how cooperation could increase (and improve) the use of ICTs to engage with citizens, two functions can be distinguished: *information* and *implementation*. First, IPC may help parliaments – mainly their staff – stay *informed* about what is going on in other parliaments and inspire them to use ICTs more efficiently or in a different and better way. Research suggests that parliaments often lack the resources to engage with new and innovative approaches within their traditional and classic political and administrative structures. Learning from the experiences of others reduces the administrative costs of IT planning and the

uncertainty of new experiences. The process is mainly bottom-up. As Cristoph Konrad explained, during the inquiry committee, the staff 'provided the parliamentarians with a number of different examples from other countries'. The relevant work of officials is clear at this point: 'as a parliamentary administration, we were asked to provide information on how others do it and to point out platforms on the web that make things more accessible', as Konrath explained.

Cooperation increases parliamentarians' and staff's knowledge about possible strategies and activities of public engagement. This provides them with a better picture of what is possible and what works, and hence allows them to evaluate their own strategy in place. This may also help them to push the outcome towards their *ideal goal, improving current strategies and activities by comparing themselves to others.* For instance, in the 'digital parliament' group, the staff of the Portuguese parliament used the 'CERDP network to ask several questions on how parliaments connect to and approach their citizens'. As the chief of the Parliamentary Support Directorate (DAP) at the time recalled, 'one of the conclusions was that the Portuguese parliament was probably one of the parliaments in the front line'.

Second, when cooperation turns into *implementation,* it may help parliaments to not only be informed but also implement these strategies. This may also help them to push the outcome towards their *ideal goal,* improving their practices and implementing new ones at a relatively low cost. As stated by all of the officials from the Austrian parliament who were interviewed, they always search for practices around the world, and specifically in Europe, to map strategies in place in other parliaments. The case of the extended procedure exemplifies this. As Cristoph Konrath explained, 'parliamentarians found the example from Croatia very interesting' and the parliament then 'used it as a model'; however, 'it was not entirely implemented because you cannot comment on every paragraph of the bill as in the Croatian model'.

As was shown above, parliamentary cooperation is a relevant learning mechanism beyond parliaments' strategies on public engagement affairs, especially the more innovative they are. This cooperation may assume different forms. Previously in the QCA analysis, the variable measuring parliamentary cooperation only captured the participation of parliaments in the World e-Parliament Conference – just one form of cooperation. Of course, these bi-annual conferences are relevant when it comes to parliaments' cooperation and exchange of ideas on different parliamentary affairs. However, through the case studies, it was possible to have a better insight into other forms of parliamentary cooperation that happen in parallel and that are

complementary to the inter-parliamentary conferences and seminars, such as through the CERDP network and direct exchange of information between parliaments.

One might say that looking only at official interactions between parliaments might deliver an incomplete picture about the amount and the substance of inter-parliamentary cooperation. However, there are good reasons to assume that a large (if not the major) part of the interactions between parliaments on these matters does take place at the official parliamentary level. Moreover, as the evidence shows, officials constitute the 'shortcuts to knowledge' that parliamentarians take advantage of to simplify their decision-making.

Finally, parliaments not only learn from others through channels offered by these international networks, but also imitate others through classic diplomatic relationships such as state meetings. A few years ago, when the former speaker of the Austrian parliament 'went to Sweden for a diplomatic visit', he came up with an idea to implement 'parliamentary democracy workshops' after learning about the Swedish experience. Ines Kerle remembered the speaker saying that 'we want to have something similar'. The officials were free to develop as they wished, as she explained. From that moment, other instruments specifically designed for young people started to be implemented, such as 'guided tours for kids and schools, a website for kids'. This is a clear example of how parliaments imitate *other parliaments* that are perceived as successful in using ICTs to communicate and engage with citizens as a response to environmental uncertainty.

Learning from others: civil society and parliamentary monitoring organisations

Besides the cooperation between parliaments and the learning mechanisms this cooperation stimulates, there are other inputs, especially from civil society, that are increasingly relevant. It has become evident that in the two committees in both countries, there was a clear desire to hear and include citizens in this process – not ordinary citizens, but rather experts, lobbyists and relevant actors in civic society.

Experts and lobbyists were heard and made several contributions. In the Portuguese case, one of the heads of 'Hemiciclo', a Portuguese parliamentary monitoring organisation (PMO), was a key element in the parliamentary group. Although Austria has a similar PMO, 'Meinparlament' (My parliament),[98] an online platform that facilitates direct contacts between citizens and their representatives in parliament, the same did not happen there.

[98] http://meinparliament.at/ https://www.ots.at/politik

Parliaments can learn from all of these key actors, but they can probably learn the most from PMOs. They have revolutionised the way complex political information is delivered to the public. They monitor and assess the functions of parliaments or their individual members, facilitating and promoting public knowledge of and participation in parliamentary processes (Mandelbaum, 2011; Ostling, 2012). By 2011, over 190 of these organisations were monitoring more than 80 national parliaments worldwide (Mandelbaum, 2011). This number is believed to be higher today. PMOs have shown promise in strengthening a number of components of democratic governance, including the accountability of parliaments to the electorate, citizen engagement in the legislative process and access to information about parliaments.

However, as David Crisóstomo shared with us, since these organisations are doing this kind of work, 'parliaments might not have the necessary incentives to allocate already-scarce resources to these ventures'. He continued by saying that on some occasions, the Portuguese parliament 'directed citizens to the website of "Hemiciclo" when citizens asked the parliament about a specific vote or about how MPs had voted'. Especially if the work of these organisations 'is validated by the parliaments', in that case there 'is a rational choice to not waste resources and time on something someone else is already doing well and whom they trust'.

Additionally, he believed that if 'Hemiciclo' did not exist, he 'doubts the Portuguese parliament would provide such similar content', not because it lacks the necessary will and commitment to do it but 'because parliament believes that is not its role'. However, a parliamentary resolution from 2012 states that parliament should provide clear information about how MPs have voted.

In the Austrian case, the online platform 'My parliament', which was created by Peter Merschitz and Peter Parycek in August 2008 in Vienna to enhance political transparency and openness towards citizens, does not work so closely with parliament. This might explain why the creators of the platform were not involved in the inquiry committee. Additionally, the platform seems to have been created for the 2008 elections, and although it is active, it does not have the spotlight it once had. Nevertheless, key citizens, scholars, local politicians and lobbyists were consulted. For instance, Andreas Kovar, a former parliamentary official and now a consultant that supports organisations in public affairs management, was extremely involved in the elaboration of the recommendations. He has shared that in his line of work, he

has developed a technological tool 'to enhance effective discussions among a large number of participants'. The eComitee,[99] as he explains, is a platform 'that does not limit participation to time or geography'. Kovar also shared that he has already approached the Austrian parliament in order for them to use this tool to engage citizens in political discussions, but 'they preferred to use their current systems and tools'. Although experts and lobbyists have been pressuring parliaments to adopt certain practices and forms of communication, parliaments still have their own 'ways of doing things' and are used to these.

7.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter has presented and discussed the mechanisms, processes and critical actors beyond parliaments' online public engagement strategies over time. The picture that emerges from the comparative – and within-case – analyses has many elements, but some broad patterns are clear.

First, the results demonstrate that even in strongly party-based parliaments like Austria's and Portugal's, the function of 'reaching out the people' is increasingly being performed through institutional channels and venues of communication offered by parliament. The relationship with citizens is still strongly mediated by the parties in these two cases, but new institutional representation channels are increasingly being developed. The results of both the Inquiry Committee for Strengthening Democracy in Austria (Enquete-Kommission betreffend Stärkung der Demokratie in Österreich) and the 'digital parliament' parliamentary group in Portugal are a reflection of these institutions' commitments to 'reach out to the people'.

Second, in light of the qualitative results of multiple case studies, we can say that the processes of institutional change are primarily underpinned by the increasing importance of digital media in today's world and are rooted in the belief that legislatures need to be more legitimate and closer to their citizens. Both parliaments have felt the need to 'catch up' with the pace of technological developments in recent years, since their first incursion to the digital world in the late 1990s. Catching up has involved a great deal of allocated resources and

[99] This tool is a joint venture between Kovar & Partners and Dr. Peter Reichl, Professor of the Faculty of Computer Science, University of Vienna.

institutional changes, which have been largely motivated by the need to address problems stemming from 'public pressure',[100] the 'distance between parliament and citizens',[101] the 'need to legitimatise parliament',[102] the 'need to be more open and accountable',[103] the 'need to go where citizens are [i.e. social media]'[104] and the 'need to take full advantage of the current ICTs'.

These institutions are responding to the influences and pressures exerted on them by their social and political environments (Suchman, 1995). Specifically, concerns over legitimacy, given the continuing decline in trust in politics, seems to have forced these institutions to adopt certain practices and organisational forms that others elsewhere have also embraced. There is a belief that 'parliament will have a better image the closer it gets to its citizens', as João Amaral explained. This concern with the image of parliament is driven by the idea that 'parliament is a central and fundamental organ in democracy', as another senior official acknowledged. The search for legitimacy is a useful concept to explain parliaments' institutionalisation of practices concerning online media. In order to gain, maintain and repair their legitimacy, both parliaments have been monitoring their environment and have incorporated institutional requirements through a mixture of imitation or mimetic isomorphism and (mostly) normative pressure (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

It has become evident that the two representative bodies analysed have been *mimicking other parliaments* that are perceived as successful in using ICTs to communicate and engage with citizens as a response to environmental uncertainty. Both parliaments are, to some degree, imitating models perceived as best practice that are taking place in other parliaments, namely in the Nordic countries and in the UK. This is particularly evident in the Portuguese case. For instance, in his discourse, the Portuguese Speaker Eduardo Ferro Rodrigues reflected on the importance of learning from other examples when he used the British parliament as a benchmark: 'the oldest parliament in the world, the British Parliament, which, as part of its "Digital Democracy" initiative, was able to gather opinions from experts, citizens and civil society to achieve political solutions and find innovative ways to move towards a democracy of proximity'. The speaker used the UK example to stress his idea that by 'communicating

100 Katrin Auel.
101 Former head of DAP.
102 Former head of DAP.
103 Katrin Auel.
104 Portuguese national politics expert.

more clearly and transparently to people by involving them in parliamentary work, parliament will be giving more power to citizens'.

When parliaments are unsure of how to proceed and what actions to take, following other parliaments provides a sense of security, which is very important when it comes to digital media and new technologies, since these are recent tools for a traditional institution like parliament. To this end, networks such as IPU and CERDP that have been promoting inter-parliamentary cooperation among parliamentary institutions have provided crucial venues and opportunities for sharing knowledge among institutions. Through these networks and their platforms, parliaments have acquired relevant knowledge on how other parliaments are using digital media to engage with their citizens.

It is also clear that both parliaments are responding to *normative influences* that derive from the work and relevance of international networks, such as the IPU, that have endorsed the use of digital media by both parliaments and relevant actors in recent years. The IPU, through the Global Centre for ICT in Parliament and its joint work with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs in particular, has been essential for introducing the digital media issue into parliaments' agendas. The work of such organisations is setting the frame for what parliaments might do with digital media and is helping them achieve those goals through their publications, reports and guidelines – such as the IPU Guidelines for Parliamentary Websites (IPU, 2009). These are crucial for the daily work of parliamentary officials who have to perform public engagement activities on a daily basis. This means that parliaments are adopting the 'conventional wisdom' that certain forms of digital communication are more 'modern, appropriate, and professional' (Scott, 2003; see also DiMaggio and Powell, 1991). *Normative pressure* is also induced by relevant actors, such as political actors, parliamentary staff and experts. All these actors play a large role in establishing norms and values for how parliaments should be engaging effectively with citizens. This means that elite actors are, at least in part, actively seeking to remodel the prevailing institutional configurations to comply with a particular set of values and perceived interests (Lowndes and Roberts, 2013).

This mixture of isomorphism differs from parliament to parliament and recalls Campbell's (2004) concept of 'bricolage'. The institutionalisation of online media within parliaments is not a simple step, but rather a complex process of translation from social, political, cultural and technological requirements to organisational practices (Vowe & Henn, 2016). As the concept of institutional translation indicates, the introduction and implementation of new ideas into parliament also contains symbolic and narrative representations (Ibid.). In

these processes, individual actors within parliament become more important, as they push for new practices and assist in implementing and creating new routines. In fact, the successful introduction of innovations requires a comprehensive strategy with a clear agenda and strong political will among legislators, as well as the sufficient allocation of resources (Norton, 1983; IPU 2012).

When parliaments change, it is not because a 'technology such as the Internet descends and, deus ex machina, reorganizes the institution's constitutive order in its own image' (Agre, 2002: 315). As the case studies have shown, parliaments have often changed as a result of the opportunities that a new technology makes available, such as the various technical reforms of the parliamentary websites, but it is only through the workings of the institution that the dynamics of the change can be found. The micro-macro link between interactions within parliaments and their institutionalised structure is important for understanding these dynamics of change – especially the interplay between critical actors, political will and institutional arrangements (and its constraints).

Parliamentary change and reform continue to be in the forefront of debate in these two institutions. This in fact translates to a broader movement of increasing citizens' calls for reforms of the electoral system, changes to the scrutiny capacities of parliamentarians, modernisation of procedures and the introduction of 'democratic innovations'[105] to engage the public in the democratic process (Smith, 2009; Geddes and Meikin, 2018). These approaches and debates are necessarily shaped by proponents' views of what is perceived to be wrong with parliament and often stem from a belief that the legislature needs to be more democratic, legitimate or effective in holding the executive to account (Ibid). Despite a general boost for parliaments to respond to systemic-level crises and to normative influences and pressure, there is likely to be a gap between the envisioned ideal (or rhetoric) and real initiatives and mechanisms of public engagement. Indeed, although concerns with public engagement are important for these institutions, they have been to some extent conservative, cautious and timid in approaching the possibilities brought in by digital media. A major conclusion drawn from these case studies is that progress can sometimes be slow, shaped by party dynamics and

[105] Democratic innovations are 'institutions that have been specifically designed to increase and deepen citizen participation in the political decision-making process' (Smith, 2009: 1).

constrained by the multiple challenges these institutions face, including its political and parliamentary culture and traditions.

To address these multifaceted challenges, political will and critical actors with the capacity to lead coherent and effective reforms are important driving forces. It has become evident that parliaments have their own 'ways of doing things'. Launching and sustaining new practices and innovations is not easy, even when key politically motivated actors push for it. Given the structural lack of resources, they have to calculate the costs and benefits of their communication and choose the tools with the lowest cost or the greatest benefits. This does not mean parliaments have total control (agency) of their activities and overall strategies of public engagement. Contrarily, the qualitative analysis suggests their strategies are also shaped by their surroundings, such as history, parliamentary and political culture and traditions, institutions and paths that have already been taken.

In the following chapter, we systematise the main findings made in this thesis and raise implications for future research.

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has focused on the changes that the advent of the Internet and digital media have brought to the relationship between parliaments and citizens. It was structured around the concept of *parliamentary (online) public engagement,* and focused on three essential research questions: first, *what tools and features are available on the websites of national parliaments to promote online public engagement?;* second, *why do the levels of online parliamentary public engagement supply vary across countries?*; and finally, '*what are the mechanisms, processes and critical actors explaining parliaments' online public engagement strategies over time?*

A mixed method approach was applied, relying on both quantitative and qualitative data and methods throughout the thesis. It started with a quantitative strand in which the measurement and description of parliamentary online public engagement activities and tools in 21 European parliaments was undergone. Then, it proceeded to a qualitative strand, first assessing the causal conditions necessary and/or sufficient for explaining the results from the quantitative strand and second studying in two case studies in depth – Portugal and Austria – in order to understand the relevant mechanisms, processes and critical actors behind parliaments' online public engagement strategies over time.

The findings presented here are based on the comparative analysis of 21 European countries and two cases studies. These two approaches have provided a better understanding of the extent to which parliaments have implemented ICTs in order to promote public engagement. This study relies on a vast original dataset that includes detailed information on the content, features and tools present in the websites of the lower chambers of 21 European countries and on website delivery, i.e. the accessibility, responsiveness and usability of PWs. Although websites are not the only means for promoting parliamentary public engagement, they have become crucial components of parliamentary operations (Triga and Milioni, 2014), and their growing use is making it increasingly incumbent on parliaments to adopt these technologies in order to remain relevant to their citizens (Griffith and Leston-Bandeira, 2012).

Finally, based on the analyses in this thesis and the overall interpretation of the findings found, several key messages can be formulated.

Main Findings

Parliaments have been in the forefront of increasing public demands for reforms to expand public access to politics in new ways and to restructure the process of democratic decision making (Dalton et al., 2001; Cain et al., 2003; Dalton, 2004; Zittel & Funchs, 2007; Norris, 2011; Fishkin and Mansbridge, 2017). They are facing increasingly challenging public expectations about the way they interact with citizens in the 21st century (Leston-Bandeira, 2016). In a context where the primacy of representative legitimacy is increasingly questioned (Norris, 2011; Fung and Wright, 2003; Rosenberg, 2007; Smith, 2009), parliaments have expended the opportunities for parliamentary public engagement to 'a point that it can now be equated to the other more traditional roles played by parliament' (Leston-Bandeira, 2014: 417).

However, while the democratic potential of digital media has been widely discussed, especially the potential for representatives (Polat, 2005; Tenscher, 2014; Vicente-Merino, 2007) and parties (Gibson and Ward, 2002; Jackson and Lilleker, 2011; Vaccari, 2008, 2013), there is a lack of information about the overall process of public engagement activities and which tools parliaments are actually providing to citizens through the use of digital media to enhance public engagement. Therefore, this thesis has tried to contribute to this field by examining the relationship between parliaments and citizens in the digital era and assessing and explaining the parliamentary public engagement activities currently in place, while rethinking the current understanding of key concepts of contemporary democracy such as 'representation', 'engagement' and 'deliberation'.

The first part laid out the theoretical and methodological basis of the thesis. Most importantly, the main concept – parliamentary (online) public engagement – was defined and measured. Building upon previous literature, a global and multidimensional index of online public engagement supply (*e-engagement index*) was created to measure the extent to which parliaments are using ICTs to promote *online public engagement*, unveiling how the tools, features and information on PWs differ between parliaments. This measure is versatile, since it provides different angles of analysis by disentangling the different ways parliaments promote engagement and easily travels across different political systems and countries. Additionally, a few measures of website delivery, such as usability, accessibility and responsiveness, were compiled. Building upon this, the second part of the thesis presented a comparative parliamentary website analysis, including quantitative and qualitative aspects. The description of the phenomena being studied and answers to the first research question were then explored.

Chapter IV, *'Establishing the phenomena: the supply of online public engagement in Europe*', provided a much needed comprehensive analysis of parliamentary websites, in terms of both content and delivery. In this chapter, three main conclusions emerged. First, *parliaments are selective* in their strategies for engaging with the public. Second, in their selectivity, most parliaments choose to *invest largely in information provision*, leaving other activities of public engagement as secondary. Third, parliaments still have *a long way to go in pursuing the way they delivery* public engagement activities to their audiences.

First, *parliaments are selective* in their strategies for engaging with the public. Instead of blindly amassing all of the characteristics that are theoretically desirable and practically available, they carefully choose which ones to include and which ones to forgo according to strategic considerations. These findings corroborate the systematic data gathered by the Inter-Parliamentary Union through the years (2010, 2012, 2014 and 2016) and are similar to those found for other political actors such as candidates' and parties' websites – for instance, in the work of Cristian Vaccari (2013). They are also consistent with the idea that political actors adjust their messaging tools, including digital media, according to their interests, ideas, resources and environment. In their selectivity, most parliaments have consolidated a set of functions that ensure the provision of information and communication, but these goals are prioritised over engaging citizens in a more profound way by using websites to consult them and allow their participation in the decision-making process.

Differences among parliaments revealed that they are not preforming at the same rate. Overall, the United Kingdom emerged as the top-ranking country (83%), followed by Denmark and Germany. Meanwhile, Spain is placed at the bottom of the rankings (42.5%). The exceptionality of the British case has been extensively studied (Leston-Bandeira, 2007). Recent comparative data has also placed the UK parliament at the top, with the highest score of the 28 European Union member states (Schwanholz et al., 2018). However, by breaking down the overall measure of online public engagement into each of its components, it becomes possible to gain further insights into the specific emphasis that is placed on each of the three dimensions by the respective parliaments as they develop their websites. This analysis has revealed greater differences between cases and some particularities that need further study. For instance, Austria performs poorly on two-way communication and interactive multimedia tools and features, but it performs better than the average on providing consultation and participation tools. This is mainly due to the lack of audio or video broadcasts/webcasts of committees and plenary sessions.

Second, most parliaments choose to *invest largely in information provision*, leaving other activities of public engagement as secondary. Although parliaments are still mainly using ICTs to provide information, which should not be underestimated, some evidence of more substantive engagement is also emerging in a small group of countries. However, this is not the case for the majority of parliaments. Some did not include any substantive public engagement activity in their repertoire of engagement activities. The majority of parliaments are still timidly embracing the opportunities brought on by ICTs to actively engage the public in innovative ways. Most parliaments are holding back from encouraging strong, substantive and active citizenship. This paradigm seems to surpass a more holistic view of democracy that seeks to support and listen to a powerful citizen voice.

Third, parliaments still have *a long way to go in pursuing the way they delivery* public engagement activities to their audiences. The results reported are worrying, given that many parliaments are neglecting important delivery functions such as accessibility to all audiences, including disable people, and responsiveness to their users. Although the websites are usually easy to navigate, evidence shows that participatory tools are less accessible than other tools, features or information. This is troubling because these are the tools that exclusively depend upon citizens' usage, which ultimately is closely linked to the possible success or lack of success of these participatory tools. These results highlight that it is not enough to just assess and describe how parliaments are creating these tools, but that it is also important to see how effective parliaments are delivering them to their citizens. Looking at this type of data has allowed us to better understand how parliaments are using the Internet and ICTs to promote public engagement – in terms of both content and delivery.

Chapter V, *'Substantive forms of online public engagement in Europe – qualitative aspects*', complemented the quantitative results of the comparative website analysis by reviewing all of the examples of how ICTs are being used to substantively involve citizens in policy deliberation and consultation, which might be relevant for practitioners and academics. Four key conclusions can be formulated. First, most *parliaments have not yet implemented activities and tools to truly engage with their citizens*. Second, some of the *examples found are of an experimental nature or are still in their infancy*. Third, in some cases, the instruments in place face two problems: *few people seem to know about these tools, and there were no clear indications as to the extent to which citizens' inputs were taken into account*. Fourth, it seems *parliaments are cautious* when it comes to citizen's actual participation in the policymaking

and prefer to convert conventional forms of participation to digital versions instead of creating innovative democratic instruments.

As the previous chapter has demonstrated, most *parliaments have not yet implemented activities and tools to truly engage with their citizens.* Of the techniques being experimented with, e-petitions are undoubtedly the most widespread. This is to be expected, given that it is a democratic instrument used by many parliaments even before the technological development. Given its long tradition and implementation over the years in representative democracies, the e-petition is considered by now to be the most developed, matured and institutionalised technological participatory procedure (Tibúrcio, 2015). Other instruments are also being experimented with to a lesser extent, such as tools for policymaking crowdsourcing – the possibility to comment on bills while they are being discussed in the parliament – and online discussion tools.

However, instruments such as crowdsourcing *are still in their infancy.* In Europe, these tools of legislative crowdsourcing are complete democratic innovations but are just one of the emerging ways to engage citizens in legislative decision making in representative democracies (Aitamurto, 2012; Brabham, 2013; Howe, 2008). This instrument is believed to boost democratic legitimacy by allowing greater citizen input into political decision making (Coleman & Blumler, 2009; Loader & Mercea, 2012). Indeed, recent findings suggest that crowdsourcing can potentially help increase throughput legitimacy by creating a more trustworthy decision-making process (Christensen et al., 2015).

Also, almost all of the cases found are discouraged by the same two well-known problems: i) *too few people know about them* and ii) *parliaments fail to integrate them into the policy process or respond to them effectively*. Even though it does not dive into to the demand side (the public), the analysis has revealed that, in many cases, few people know about these tools, which ultimately results in low levels of participation. For instance, the online forum developed by the Portuguese parliament has seen little participation. Additionally, in many cases, there were no clear indications as to the extent to which citizens' inputs were taken into account. For instance, the Austrian parliament is experimenting with a crowdsourcing instrument by collecting both comments and votes for ministerial drafts on its parliamentary website; however, even though the procedure is explained to the public, it is not clear how these inputs are then integrated into the decision-making process.

Finally, the analysis in this chapter has also revealed that *parliaments are converting conventional forms of participation to the digital world.* The e-petition is a fine example of this

trend, which is now considered to be the most developed, matured and institutionalised technological participatory procedure (Tibúrcio, 2015). Of course, this transformation process should not be underestimated – the Internet has made the once-laborious process of organising, publicising and submitting petitions much easier – but it suggests parliaments are conservative and approach innovation cautiously and timidly. Besides, it would be a mistake to limit the Internet's democratic role to single-click and individualistic inputs (Moss and Coleman, 2014). This thesis has shown that, in the sample of parliaments analysed, a systemic attempt to supplement the limited model of single-click citizenship with broader processes and instruments promoting substantive public engagement in new and innovative ways is still missing.

The third part of this thesis went beyond descriptive analyses and explored the second and third research questions. Chapter VI, '*Explaining cross-national differences: a fuzzy-set analysis',* explored the causal conditions for the variation of online public engagement supply among the 21 parliaments. Relying on previous theoretical and empirical studies, as well different strands of the new institutionalism, four main explanations for online public engagement supply were tested: two structural explanations – *distrust and technological hypotheses* – and two organizational and bureaucratic explanations – *learning and resources hypotheses*. Through a qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) it was possible to test these hypotheses.

Three main conclusions emerged from this analysis. First, *digital parliaments are the result of both the agency of the political actors who operate in a parliament and a by-product of structural factors*. Second, although both structural and organisational conditions indeed have some resonance with the overall supply of parliaments' e-engagement, *none of them are necessary conditions*. Third, as expected, *management structures are a key ingredient for explaining the lack of a strong online public engagement strategy*. Fourth, *learning mechanisms,* from exposure to international networks promoting a digital agenda for parliaments, do *not always translate into better parliamentary public engagement.*

Like most parliamentary affairs, parliaments' online public engagement strategies are the *result of both the agency of the political actors who operate in a parliament and a by-product of the technological and societal environments in which parliaments are embedded*. The QCA results showed that digital parliaments mainly rely on a combination of parliaments' resource capacities and environmental pressures, namely citizens' political attitudes and digital literacy. At the macro level, these results reinforce two arguments. First, they corroborate the

widespread belief that many policymakers are engaging with ICTs as an effective response to high levels of disillusionment and disenchantment with the political process, or that many parliaments have embarked on an endless pursuit of trust – thus confirming the *distrust hypothesis*. Second, they corroborate the argument that technological diffusion and modernisation influence institutions in the virtual political system. Results have shown that a strong digital literacy is a sufficient condition for a better level of online political engagement, which confirms the *technological hypothesis*. Indeed, when the absence of the outcome was evaluated, it was clear that parliaments with low e-engagement have weaker incentives to invest in their online presence, given that a large part of their citizens are still not digitally literate.

Although both structural and organisational conditions indeed have some resonance with the overall supply of parliaments' e-engagement, the necessity test revealed *none of the conditions are necessary – i.e.* they don't need to be present for the outcome to occur. However, they are sufficient, meaning both organisational factors and contextual factors are sufficient conditions for high supply of online public engagement activities and tools. Also, as expected, different paths combining multiple factors – both structural and organisational – were found. A lesson to be learned from this analysis is that the performance of parliaments in terms of their online public engagement supply is largely a matter of their own agency as well as structural factors – since all paths share a combination of different conditions. Also, as expected, *management structures are a key ingredient for explaining the lack of a strong online public engagement strategy.* They play an important role in explaining why parliaments are not offering more substantive public engagement tools; in many cases, they lack important financial and human resources to pursue that aim.

Finally, the QCA displayed mixed results regarding the impact of learning mechanisms from exposure to international networks promoting a digital agenda for parliaments. Exposure to these international networks and their events does *not always translate into better parliamentary public engagement.* However, multiple case studies have shown that exposure to policy experiments of other parliaments is still relevant for parliaments when designing their online public strategies, in order to gain new information and eliminate the possibility of e-policy failure by learning from the experience of other countries.

Finally, Chapter VII, *'A tale of two parliaments',* focused on two case studies, Portugal and Austria and therefore completed the final and third part of the thesis. Through this chapter, it was possible to evaluate how these two parliaments have changed over the years since they

started to realise the potential of ICT tools and began developing online public engagement strategies, which critical actors are involved and the mechanisms and processes that are taking place. This analysis also made it possible to refine the findings and close the gaps left open by the comparative analysis concerning the variables that explain parliaments' supply on these matters. To this end, four main findings merit highlight. First, besides parliamentary resources, a *committed leadership and political will from key critical actors are also important* when it comes to changing the way parliaments engage with citizens through digital media. Second, *both structural hypotheses (distrust and technological) were again confirmed.* Third, these institutions are *mimicking other parliaments* that are perceived as successful in using ICTs to communicate and engage with citizens as a response to environmental uncertainty. Fourth, *inter-parliamentary cooperation, i.e. learning mechanisms, are increasingly relevant for parliaments.*

Through this chapter, we unveiled the impact of other factors besides the ones considered in the QCA. Although parliamentary resources are relevant, it is now clear that a *committed leadership and political will from key critical actors are also significant ingredients*. There is some confirmation of this in the finding that parliaments – for instance, in Latin American countries, despite their lower national incomes – have achieved levels of communication with citizens that are comparable to European parliaments. The key factor in enhancing public engagement is not only a matter of appropriately allocating resources but also the political will of legislators and key actors in parliaments.

The narratives of parliamentary actors have shown that perceptions of what is wrong with parliament, belief that the legislature needs to be more democratic and legitimate, political pressures to respond to systemic-level crises and political commitment from leadership gives impetus to parliamentary reforms. Successful parliamentary reforms or innovations require a clear agenda, comprehensive strategy on public engagement and strong political will, as well as sufficiently allocated resources (IPU 2012; Norton, 1983; Seo, 2017). This is crucial in opening up parliamentary proceedings in truly meaningful ways in order for parliament to engage with the public. For instance, in the opinion of the interviewees, the lack of leadership in the past explains why the Portuguese parliament, for instance, has not made more progress.

The results of the analysis gave *strong support for the theoretical explanations based on the impact of the surroundings of parliaments*, namely the impact of citizens' political attitudes – especially political distrust – and the technological environment. It has become

evident that parliaments are addressing problems stemming from 'public pressure',[106] the 'distance between parliament and citizens',[107] the 'need to legitimatise parliament',[108] the 'need to be more open and accountable'[109] and the 'need to go where citizens are [i.e. social media]'[110] by taking advantage of digital media. Moreover, parliaments are aware that societies are increasingly digital and are trying to catch up with the pace of technological developments of recent years.

In order to catch up with the pace of the Internet era and to respond to systemic-level crises, normative influences and pressure, representative bodies have been *mimicking other parliaments* that are perceived as successful in using ICTs to communicate and engage with citizens as a response to environmental uncertainty. This became evident when the cases of Austria and Portugal were analysed in depth. Both parliaments are, to some degree, *learning from the policy experiments of others* and imitating models perceived as best practice that are used in other parliaments, especially the Nordic and British models. These institutions are doing this in order to efficiently gain new information and eliminate the possibility of failure by learning from the experiences of other parliaments and to comply with standards of what is perceived to be a legitimate parliament and the necessary steps to achieve it. Although the qualitative comparative analysis revealed mixed results regarding the learning hypothesis, the case studies showed the important role of inter-parliamentary cooperation as a learning mechanism of parliamentary public engagement. As far as it is known, this was never assessed before and this interesting result suggests a significant research agenda, which needs to be addressed further.

Both institutions are 'learning from others' – it is a common practice to 'look at MPs' websites, institutional websites and other international parliamentary organisations' websites'. Parliamentary actors (political and technical) derive great benefits from this inter-parliamentary cooperation. This collaboration has helped these parliaments – mainly their staff – to stay *informed* about what is going on in other parliaments and has inspired them to use ICTs more efficiently or in a different and better way. Additionally, it has also pushed them towards their ideal goal, improving their practices and helping the *implementation of new instruments* at a relatively low cost. Besides the cooperation among parliamentary institutions,

[106] Katrin Auel.
[107] Cristoph Konrath.
[108] Portuguese senior official.
[109] Katrin Auel.
[110] Portuguese expert on parliamentary affairs.

there are other learning mechanisms. It has become evident that in the matters of how parliaments communicate and engage with citizens, there have been efforts to consult and include experts, lobbyists and relevant actors of civic society.

Although there is a recognition that parliaments need to reach the public, parliamentary culture and traditions sometimes constrains parliaments, which does not appear conducive to embracing more participatory and interactive channels of influence. There is still a strong attachment to traditional representative democracy and a lukewarm attitude towards democratic innovations in the cases of Portugal and Austria. However, this is not a specific feature of the two cases studies – the same has been reported for other cases such as Finland (Arter, 2012; Seo, 2017). Current strategies in place for engaging with citizens might bring about a more participatory legislative culture in the long run, but for now it is still too early to draw conclusions about the impact of the new progresses achieved by the recent reforms and changes in both parliaments. Additionally, in strongly party-based parliaments like Austria's and Portugal's, the function of 'reaching out to the people' is still mainly performed by parties and their leaders through their own channels and venues of communication. The relationship with citizens is strongly mediated by the parties, but complementary institutional channels of representation have been increasingly developed in parallel with the traditional partisan representation channels (Leston-Bandeira and Tibúrcio, 2012). As has been shown, these institutional channels of representation have been implemented through the websites and/or social networks. Nevertheless, parliaments still face many challenges when adopting new technology and new media. Many parliamentarians and officials still have concerns about how to communicate as a neutral and collective institutional voice.

This thesis has also shown that parliaments have not been the only active players in the field of digital citizenship. Other initiatives have come from the private sector, academia and organised interest groups. In particular, citizen-based groups have begun to monitor or assess the functioning of parliaments or their individual members, often seeking to facilitate and promote public knowledge of and participation in parliamentary processes. These parliamentary monitoring organisations (PMOs) have shown promise in strengthening a number of components of democratic governance, including the accountability of parliaments to the electorate, citizen engagement in the legislative process and access to information about parliaments and their work (Mandelbaum, 2011). To a lesser extent, they have shown the capacity to encourage parliamentary reform, especially within the Portuguese parliament.

Finally, reflecting on the multi-faceted relationships parliaments have with the public, the results show that public engagement has been developed to fill in a gap in symbolic representation and why this matter in today's context. It also indicates that public engagement can contribute towards an amplification of parliamentary representation, enabling new forms of representing the institution, even in strongly party-based parliaments like Portugal's and Austria's.

Theoretical implications and future research

This thesis contributed to the literature by providing a thorough examination of the changing relationship between national parliaments and the public in contemporary democracies, which has been mostly addressed as an indirect outcome of other core functions of parliament or as a consequence of a parliament's relationship with the government and/or parties (Leston-Bandeira, 2012c).

A comparative study of 21 parliaments and multiple case studies were conducted, first by establishing a comprehensive analytical framework connecting normative conceptions with practical indicators, and then by applying them to the national parliaments in Europe and to multiple dimensions of institutional engagement activities with the public. The study's findings indicate not only the continuing necessity for parliamentary reform and innovation, but also the need for further academic study of the topic both theoretically and empirically.

As was explained earlier, the analysis conducted in this thesis only speaks in terms of potential. Most indicators measure the *potential for* rather than the actual *provision of* public engagement. That is, by simply asking citizens to 'have their say' through email or online polls, PWs do not necessarily fulfil these promises unless politicians and staffers act upon the inputs that citizens might provide through these tools (Vaccari, 2013). Assessing the provision of tools and information for public engagement is relevant, since it is the pre-condition for establishing effective engagement, but further studies would need to explore and examine the actual provision of public engagement. Additionally, since this thesis has focused on the supply side, further studies should explore the demand side in order to understand how the public receives these tools, whether multiple representative claims actually take place and if this has any effect on the public's perception of the institution. In particular, studies are needed to assess the impact of parliament's levels of achievement on citizens' engagement. Do citizens use the mechanisms available to them to communicate their concerns and their views on policy matters? Are citizens more engaged by using these tools? And ultimately, does this use have

an impact on citizen's trust in parliament? As parliaments increasingly embrace new media channels to engage with the public, we need a better understanding of the levels of impact of these initiatives on citizens.

This thesis reflects the need for new perspectives of comparative studies to identify and conceptualise the changing and dynamic characters of European democracies beyond the models dominated by analyses of Anglo-Saxon countries (Leston-Bandeira, 2007), the public administration and democratic governance perspective (Leston-Bandeira and Ward, 2008), and the formalist model of legislative studies based on the concept of 'parliamentary chain of governance' (Seo, 2017). Additionally, bridges must be built between our understanding of the online and offline domains, as well as between different theoretical perspectives and realities. For instance, this thesis has shown that offline realities contribute to shaping digital politics. Parliaments' online presence is strongly affected by their resources, organisational features and actors' political will, all of which originate outside of the realm of digital media and to a large extent pre-exist them. Also, it has become evident that Portugal and Austria are also responding to the ongoing structural changes occurring in political, economic and social environments on a global scale. These transformational challenges heavily affect the relationships between national parliaments and citizens, as well as the broader quality of democracy and citizenship (Seo, 2017). This suggests a significant research agenda, which needs to be addressed further.

While presenting a comparative study followed by a case study of the Austrian and Portuguese parliaments and their relationships with citizens, this thesis also tried to present new insights on these challenges and their interplay with parliaments' supply of activities and tools of online public engagement. Besides the ongoing structural changes occurring in the surroundings of parliaments, the nature of parliamentary politics and political culture and traditions are themselves challenging for the way parliaments reach out and communicate to and with citizens.

Additionally, further research analysing parliamentary websites needs to contemplate measures of parliaments' delivery of public engagement tools, features and activities. This assessment has been absent from related scholarship, which has not privileged the evaluation of content usability and the quality, accuracy or even depth of the information provided. However, the results clearly show that looking at this type of data – usability, accessibility and responsiveness – allows for a better understanding of how parliaments are using the Internet and ICTs to promote public engagement – in terms of both content and delivery. In fact, the phrase partially coined by Bill Gates, 'content is king, but usability is queen', is a good

representation of the idea that the delivery of a website is as important as its content. Nevertheless, there are further measures that need to be assessed to fully capture the efficiency and delivery of parliamentary websites. For instance, at the simplest level of engagement – providing information – parliaments are providing a great volume of information (except for Spain), as the results have shown; however, the content analysis performed demonstrates that parliamentary websites have plenty of information, but in many cases it is written in such complex ways that is difficult to understand it, which in turn makes it not particularly easy for citizens to act on it. Parliamentary language is part of our everyday practices; however, parliamentary jargon can be confusing (Palonen, 2011). Moreover, the use of political jargon combined with an abundance of information available actually may repel citizens from engaging further. Therefore, user-friendly and highly accessible parliamentary websites designed for citizens are extremely important. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide a full-scale comparative examination of this issue and its implications. Nevertheless, this question remains a future task to be addressed.

Finally, if we aim to fully understand how parliaments engage with citizens in contemporary politics, we cannot be content with simply adding digital media to the picture. We need to broaden our horizons and start drawing a new picture, one framed by the cumulative knowledge we have built over time that aims to represent all of the possible venues and channels where these connections may take place, all types of actors involved – including both political and non-political actors – and all types of activities, from passive to active forms of engagement (Vaccari, 2013: 223). Having established this cumulative knowledge, we can then pursue an adequate study of this topic and address crucial questions such as *are parliaments really engaging their citizens substantively?* and *is the Internet helping parliaments fill the gap between citizens and parliamentary institutions?* This study has shown that on one hand, some instruments and opportunities are in place that have the potential to engage the public in the decision-making process, but on the other hand, parliaments are still cautiously using digital media. These are important questions that need further exploration from different disciplines, where the legislative studies discipline needs to be, of course, at the centre stage.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A – INTER-RATER RELIABILITY CHECKS

Table A1 Fully crossed design

	Austria		**Belgium**		**Bulgaria**		**Croatia**		**Denmark**		**Estonia**	
	Coder A	Coder B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B
1	X		X		X	X	X		X		X	X
2	X		X		X		X		X	X	X	
3	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	
4	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	
5	X		X		X		X	X	X		X	
6	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
7	X	X	X		X		X		X		X	X
8	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	
9	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		X	X
10	X	X	X		X	X	X		X		X	
11	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
12	X		X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
13	X		X	X	X		X	X	X		X	
14	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
15	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X		X	X
16	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	
17	X	X	X	X	X		X		X		X	X
18	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	
19	X		X		X		X	X	X		X	X
20	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	
21	X		X		X	X	X		X	X	X	X
22	X		X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X
23	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	
24	X	X	X		X		X		X	X	X	X
25	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X		X	
26	X	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X
27	X		X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
28	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	
29	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		X	
30	X		X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X
31	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
32	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X		X	X
33	X		X		X		X	X	X	X	X	
34	X	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	
35	X		X		X		X	X	X		X	
36	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		X	X
37	X	X	X		X		X		X		X	
38	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
39	X		X		X		X		X	X	X	
40	X		X		X	X	X		X	X	X	X

Table A1 (continue)

	Finland		**France**		**Germany**		**Greece**		**Hungary**		**Ireland**	
	A	B	**A**	**B**	**A**	**B**	**A**	**B**	**A**	**B**	**A**	**B**
1	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
2	X		X		X		X		X		X	X
3	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
4	X		X		X		X		X		X	
5	X		X	X	X		X		X		X	X
6	X	X	X		X		X		X		X	X
7	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
8	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
9	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		X	X
10	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
11	X		X		X		X		X		X	X
12	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
13	X	X	X		X		X		X		X	
14	X		X		X	X	X		X		X	
15	X		X		X	X	X		X		X	
16	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
17	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
18	X		X	X	X		X		X		X	
19	X		X		X		X		X		X	
20	X		X	X	X		X		X		X	
21	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
22	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
23	X	X	X	X	X		X		X		X	X
24	X	X	X	X	X		X		X		X	
25	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
26	X	X	X		X	X	X		X		X	
27	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
28	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
29	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	
30	X	X	X		X		X		X		X	
31	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
32	X		X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X
33	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
34	X	X	X		X	X	X		X		X	X
35	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	
36	X		X		X		X		X	X	X	
37	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
38	X	X	X		X	X	X		X		X	X
39	X	X	X		X	X	X		X		X	
40	X		X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X

Table A1 (continue)

	Italy		Netherlands		Portugal		Romania		Slovakia	
	A	**B**	**A**	**B**	**A**	**B**	**A**	**B**	**A**	**B**
1	X	X	X		X		X		X	
2	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	
3	X	X	X	X	X		X		X	
4	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X
5	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X
6	X		X		X	X	X		X	X
7	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	
8	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	
9	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
10	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	
11	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
12	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
13	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	
14	X		X		X	X	X		X	X
15	X		X		X		X	X	X	
16	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X
17	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
18	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
19	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X
20	X		X		X		X		X	
21	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
22	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X
23	X		X	X	X		X		X	
24	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	
25	X	X	X		X		X		X	
26	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	
27	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
28	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X
29	X		X	X	X	X	X		X	X
30	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
31	X	X	X		X		X		X	
32	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X
33	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	
34	X		X	X	X		X		X	
35	X		X		X		X		X	
36	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	
37	X	X	X	X	X		X		X	
38	X		X	X	X	X	X		X	X
39	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X
40	X		X	X	X		X		X	

Table A1 (continue)

	Slovenia		Spain		Sweden		United Kingdom	
	A	**B**	**A**	**B**	**A**	**B**	**A**	**B**
1	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
2	X		X		X		X	X
3	X	X	X		X		X	
4	X		X		X		X	X
5	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
6	X		X		X		X	X
7	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
8	X		X		X		X	
9	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
10	X		X		X		X	X
11	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
12	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
13	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
14	X	X	X		X	X	X	
15	X		X		X		X	X
16	X	X	X		X	X	X	
17	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
18	X		X		X	X	X	X
19	X	X	X		X		X	X
20	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
21	X		X		X		X	
22	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
23	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
24	X	X	X	X	X		X	
25	X		X		X		X	
26	X		X		X	X	X	X
27	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
28	X		X		X	X	X	
29	X		X	X	X	X	X	
30	X	X	X	X	X		X	
31	X	X	X		X	X	X	
32	X		X	X	X		X	X
33	X		X	X	X		X	
34	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
35	X	X	X		X		X	
36	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
37	X		X		X		X	
38	X		X		X	X	X	X
39	X		X		X		X	X
40	X	X	X	X	X		X	

Table A2 Simple agreement rates

Country	Simple Agreement Rate
Austria	95,2%
Belgium	100,0%
Bulgaria	100,0%
Croatia	95,2%
Denmark	85,7%
Estonia	95,2%
Finland	95,2%
France	90,5%
German	100,0%
Greece	90,5%
Hungary	95,2%
Ireland	100,0%
Italy	85,7%
Netherlands	100,0%
Portugal	95,2%
Romania	100,0%
Slovakia	95,2%
Slovenia	100,0%
Spain	85,7%
Sweden	100,0%
United Kingdom	95,2%
Overall Sample N=21	95,2%

Table A3 Krippendorff's alpha for nominal and ordinal-level variables

Country	*Kalpha (for nominal-level variables)*	*Units*	*Kalpha (for ordinal-level variables)*	*Units*	*Total Units*
Austria	0,888	20	1,000	1	21
Belgium	1,000	19	1,000	2	21
Bulgaria	1,000	20	1,000	1	21
Croatia	1,000	20	1,000	1	21
Denmark	0,873	18	1,000	3	21
Estonia	0,856	18	1,000	3	21
Finland	0,877	20	1,000	1	21
France	1,000	19	1,000	2	21
German	1,000	20	1,000	1	21
Greece	0,875	19	0,833	2	21
Hungary	0,896	20	1,000	1	21
Ireland	1,000	20	1,000	1	21
Italy	0,797	20	1,000	1	21
Netherlands	1,000	18	1,000	3	21
Portugal	1,000	19	0,833	2	21
Romania	1,000	20	1,000	1	21
Slovakia	0,778	20	1,000	1	21
Slovenia	1,000	10	1,000	2	12
Spain	0,626	19	1,000	2	21
Sweden	1,000	19	1,000	2	21
United Kingdom	0,831	20	1,000	1	21
Overall Sample	**0,925**	**407**	**0,962**	**34**	**441**

APPENDIX B – VARIABLES

Table B1 Ordinal variables transformation

Indicators	Original Coding	Recode
I26: Are there links to Social media (any social media platform)?	-None social media = 0 -One social media link to a thematic account = 0.25 -One social media link to a parliamentary account = 0.50 -More than one social media link = 0.75 *(i.e. one parliament account + one thematic account)* - More than one social media link =1 *(>= 1 parliamentary accounts)*	-> 0.25 = 0 -> 0.50 - 1 = 1
I39: Does it provide an e-petitions system?	- fulfils none=0 - Fulfils one dimension of the total five = 0.2; - Fulfils two dimensions of the total five = 0.4; - fulfils three dimensions of the total five = 0.6; - fulfils four dimensions of the total five = 0.8; - fulfils all five dimensions= 1;	-> 0 = 0 -> 0.2 - 1 = 1

Note:
1) For details on the definition of a thematic and parliamentary account please see Chapter III..
2) For details on what constitutes the five dimensions of analysis of an e-petition system please see Chapter III.

Table B2 Information Index' Internal consistency check (KR -20)

	Scale Mean if item Deleted	Scale Variance of Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	KR-20 Alpha if the item is excluded
Description of bodies and functions Parliamentary	16,9048	3,890	,686	,448
Virtual tour/panorama of the parliament	17,2857	4,214	,027	**,**547
Information regarding how to visit the parliament	16,8571	4,529	0,000	,522
Schedule of current and planned parliamentary activities and events	16,9048	4,590	-,117	,541
Full-text search tool	17,0000	3,700	,507	,440
Advertisement of cultural events online	17,3810	4,048	,106	,528
Guide (e.g. factsheet or summary) of the legislative process	17,0000	4,000	,279	,486
Search facility for pending or ongoing legislation	16,9048	4,290	,211	,505
Guide (e.g. factsheet or summary) on the role of members	17,0476	3,848	,329	,473
A list of members	16,8571	4,529	0,000	,522
Bibliographies of all MPs	16,9048	4,290	,211	,505
Guide (e.g. factsheet or summary) on the role of committees	16,9048	3,890	,686	,448
List of committees	16,8571	4,529	0,000	,522
Schedule of Parliament debates	16,9048	4,490	-,010	,529
Text search tool for debates	17,2381	4,090	,095	,529
Is there an option to download the debates or to request it	17,0952	3,990	,199	,501
List of written questions	16,9048	4,590	-,117	,541
Information on educational activities/target to schools or young people and/or games	17,0476	3,848	,329	,473
Committees membership	16,8571	4,529	0,000	,522
Committees work documents/reports	17,0476	4,448	-,048	**,551**
MP s recording Votes	17,2381	3,990	,146	,516

KR-20 = 0.521 (Number of items =21)
Decision: In order to increase the KR-20 alpha the item "Is there committees work documents/reports" was removed. Hence, the KR-20 increased to 0.551 (20 itens).

Table B3 Communication and interactive multimedia Index Internal consistency check (KR -20)

	Scale Mean if item Deleted	Scale Variance of Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	KR-20 Alpha if the item is excluded
Blogs from parliamentary bodies	8,2857	2,914	,096	,439
Alerting service or a weekly or monthly newsletter/bulletin	7,7143	2,514	,172	,421
Email address to contact the committees	7,6667	2,833	-,020	,492
Email address to contact the parliamentary groups	7,8095	3,262	-,265	**,581**
Email address to contact the MPs	7,3333	3,033	0,000	,447
Links to MPs external and personal Websites	7,6190	2,648	,114	,441
A mobile application of the parliament	7,9524	2,648	,085	,455
Links to Social media	7,5238	2,462	,324	,368
Audio or video archive of Committees meeting	7,4762	2,162	,705	,250
Audio or video broadcast and/or webcast (streaming) of Committees meetings	7,5238	2,162	,600	,267
Audio or video archive of plenary meeting	7,3810	2,748	,329	,398
Audio or video broadcast and/or webcast (streaming) of plenary meetings	7,3810	2,748	,329	,398

KR-20 = 0.444 (Number of items=12)

Decision: In order to increase the KR-20 alpha the item “Is there an email address to contact the parliamentary groups?” was removed. Hence, the KR-20 increased to 0.581 (11 itens).

Table B4 Consultation and Participation Index Internal consistency check (KR -20)

	Scale Mean if item Deleted	Scale Variance of Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	KR-20 Alpha if the item is excluded
Online surveys or opinion polls (closed answers)	1,1765	1,279	,643	,486
Online conferences/debates between MPs and citizens (With reply)	1,1765	1,279	,643	,486
Online advisory committees	1,2353	1,691	0,000	,606
Online citizens/discussion fora	1,1176	1,235	,468	,510
Option to submit online evidence to an inquiry	1,1176	1,235	,468	,510
Possibility to comment bills drafts	1,0588	1,559	-,022	,674
Possibility to do suggestions of issues for debate or bills suggestions	1,2353	1,691	0,000	,606
Does it provide the possibility to vote online on a specific public issue to be adopted	1,1765	1,529	,172	,593
E-petitions system	,5882	1,132	,302	,586

KR-20 = 0.597 (Number of items=9)
Decision: Maintain the KR-20 of 0.597 without removing any indicator.

Table B5 E- Engagement Index (all indicators) Reliability check (KR -20)

	Scale Mean if item Deleted	Scale Variance of Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	KR-20 Alpha if the item is excluded
Description of bodies and functions Parliamentary	26,2353	14,254	,494	,668
Virtual tour/panorama of the parliament	26,5294	14,077	,243	,677
Information regarding how to visit the parliament	26,1765	15,217	,000	,687
Schedule of current and planned parliamentary activities and events	26,2353	15,254	-,050	,692
Full-text search tool	26,3529	14,180	,298	,673
Advertisement of cultural events online	26,7059	14,096	,222	,679
Guide (e.g. factsheet or summary) of the legislative process	26,2941	14,283	,328	,673
Search facility for pending or ongoing legislation	26,2353	15,129	,016	,689
Guide (e.g. factsheet or summary) on the role of members	26,4118	13,945	,331	,670
A list of members	26,1765	15,217	,000	,687
Bibliographies of all MPs	26,2353	15,129	,016	,689
MPs vote records	26,6471	14,243	,183	,683
Guide (e.g. factsheet or summary) on the role of committees	26,2353	14,254	,494	,668
List of committees	26,1765	15,217	,000	,687
Committees membership	26,1765	15,217	,000	,687
Committees work documents/reports	26,2941	14,971	,117	**,685**
Schedule of Parliament debates	26,2353	15,004	,082	,686
Text search tool for debates	26,5294	14,140	,225	,679
Is there an option to download the debates or to request it	26,3529	13,680	,476	,661
List of written questions	26,2353	15,254	-,050	,692
Information on educational activities/target to schools or young people and/or games	26,4118	13,695	,411	,664
Audio or video archive of Committees meeting	26,3529	14,118	,320	,672

Audio or video archive of plenary meeting	26,2353	15,254	-,050	,692
Audio or video broadcast and/or webcast (streaming) of Committees meetings	26,3529	14,118	,320	,672
Audio or video broadcast and/or webcast (streaming) of plenary meetings	26,2353	15,254	-,050	,692
Is there Blogs from parliamentary bodies?	27,1765	15,217	,000	,687
Blogs from parliamentary bodies	26,4118	14,695	,099	,688
Links to Social media	26,5882	14,195	,200	,681
Email address to contact the committees	26,5294	14,140	,225	,679
Email address to contact the parliamentary groups	26,7059	14,596	,091	**,691**
Email address to contact the MPs	26,1765	15,217	,000	,687
Links to MPs external and personal Websites	26,5294	14,827	,039	,695
A mobile application of the parliament	26,7647	13,566	,373	,665
Online surveys or opinion polls (closed answers)	27,1176	14,298	,469	,669
Online conferences/debates between MPs and citizens (With reply)	27,1176	14,298	,469	,669
Online advisory committees	27,1765	15,217	,000	,687
Online citizens/discussion fora	27,0588	13,871	,499	,662
Option to submit online evidence to an inquiry	27,0588	14,121	,395	,669
Possibility to comment bills drafts	27,0588	15,934	-,312	,709
Possibility to do suggestions of issues for debate or bills suggestions	27,0588	14,871	,092	,687
E-petitions system	26,5294	14,140	,225	,679
Does it provide the possibility to vote online on a specific public issue to be adopted	27,1176	15,298	-,074	,693

KR-20 = 0.597 (Number of items=42) **Decision:** In order to increase the KR-20 alpha the item and following already the previous decisions two indicators were removed, “Is there committees work documents/reports” and “Is there an email address to contact the parliamentary groups**?”**. Hence, the KR-20 increased to **0.688** (40 itens)

APPENDIX C – CORRELATIONS

Table C1 Pearson' Correlations

		e-engagement	Information	Communication and Interactive multimedia	Consultation Participation	Web Usability
e-engagement	Pearson Correlation	1	,851**	,657**	,473*	,246
	Sig. (bilateral)		,000	,001	,030	,282
	N	21	21	21	21	21
Information	Pearson Correlation	,851**	1	,325	,248	,103
	Sig. (bilateral)	,000		,150	,279	,657
	N	21	21	21	21	21
Communication and Interactive multimedia	Pearson Correlation	,657**	,325	1	-,061	,059
	Sig. (bilateral)	,001	,150		,794	,800
	N	21	21	21	21	21
Consultation Participation	Pearson Correlation	,473*	,248	-,061	1	,442*
	Sig. (bilateral)	,030	,279	,794		,045
	N	21	21	21	21	21
Web Usability	Person Correlation	,246	,103	,059	,442*	1
	Sig. (bilateral)	,282	,657	,800	,045	
	N	21	21	21	21	21

* Correlation is significant at 0.05 (bilateral).

** Correlation is significant at 0.01 (bilateral).

APPENDIX D – CONDITIONS: RAW DATA AND SOURCES

Table D1 Values for conditions (Raw data)

	Contextual Conditions		*Organizational Conditions*		
Cases	**Digital Skills (D)** [0-100%]	**Political Distrust (DT)** [0-100%]	**Human parliamentary capacity (H)** [0-n]	**Financial parliamentary Capacity (F)** [0-n]	**Learning exposure (L)** [0-1]
Austria	67,0	54,1	2.35	1 504 344$	1,00
Belgium	61,0	60,5	4.03	1 208 153$	0,33
Bulgaria	29,0	74,7	1.70	3 458$	0,00
Croatia	41,0	51,8	1.46	249 065$	0,00
Denmark	71,0	52,5	2.42	657 540$	0,33
Estonia	60,0	55,7	2.45	453 376$	0,00
Finland	76,0	49,0	2.16	720 245$	1,00
France	57,0	75,1	1.99	1 287 086$	1,00
Germany	68,0	87,2	4.85	1 817 588$	0,33
Greece	46,0	81,0	4.48	756 456$	0,00
Hungary	50,0	66,6	2.46	404 997$	1,00
Ireland	48,0	67,6	3.29	963 198$	0,00
Italy	44,0	79,7	1.81	2 155 438$	1,00
Netherlands	79,0	53,9	3.83	1 089 951$	0,00
Portugal	50,0	72,8	1.51	1 263 233$	1,00
Romania	29,0	76,1	4.28	574 788$	0,00
Slovakia	59,0	70,4	2.59	548 631$	0,00
Slovenia	54,0	83,4	2.69	470 010$	0,00
Spain	55,0	83,0	1.12	381 178$	1,00
Sweden	77,0	47,0	1.72	569 766$	0,33
UK	71,0	67,6	3.65	502 727 $	1,00

Table D2 Data sources for the contextual conditions

	D		DT	
	Year	*Source*	*Year*	*Source*
Austria	2017	Eurostat	2012-17	Eurobarometer
Belgium	2017	Eurostat	2012-17	Eurobarometer
Bulgaria	2017	Eurostat	2012-17	Eurobarometer
Croatia	2017	Eurostat	2012-17	Eurobarometer
Denmark	2017	Eurostat	2012-17	Eurobarometer
Estonia	2017	Eurostat	2012-17	Eurobarometer
Finland	2017	Eurostat	2012-17	Eurobarometer
France	2017	Eurostat	2012-17	Eurobarometer
Germany	2017	Eurostat	2012-17	Eurobarometer
Greece	2017	Eurostat	2012-17	Eurobarometer
Hungary	2017	Eurostat	2012-17	Eurobarometer
Ireland	2017	Eurostat	2012-17	Eurobarometer
Italy	2016	Eurostat	2012-17	Eurobarometer
Netherlands	2017	Eurostat	2012-17	Eurobarometer
Portugal	2017	Eurostat	2012-17	Eurobarometer
Romania	2017	Eurostat	2012-17	Eurobarometer
Slovakia	2017	Eurostat	2012-17	Eurobarometer
Slovenia	2017	Eurostat	2012-17	Eurobarometer
Spain	2017	Eurostat	2012-17	Eurobarometer
Sweden	2017	Eurostat	2012-17	Eurobarometer
UK	2017	Eurostat	2012-17	Eurobarometer

Table D3 Data sources for the organizational conditions

	H		F		L	
	Year	*Source*	*Year*	*Source*	*Year*	*Source*
Austria	2017	IPU	2017	IPU	2014/16/18	IPU
Belgium	2017	IPU	2017	IPU	2014/16/18	IPU
Bulgaria	2014	CERDP	2017	Bulgarian PW*	2014/16/18	IPU
Croatia	2017	IPU	2017	Croatian PW**	2014/16/18	IPU
Denmark	2017	IPU	2017	IPU	2014/16/18	IPU
Estonia	2013	IPU	2017	CERDP	2014/16/18	IPU
Finland	2016	CERDP	2016	CERDP	2014/16/18	IPU
France	2017	IPU	2017	IPU	2014/16/18	IPU
Germany	2017	IPU	2017	CERDP	2014/16/18	IPU
Greece	2017	IPU	2017	CERDP	2014/16/18	IPU
Hungary	2017	IPU	2017	CERDP	2014/16/18	IPU
Ireland	2017	IPU	2017	IPU	2014/16/18	IPU
Italy	2017	IPU	2017	IPU	2014/16/18	IPU
Netherlands	2014	CERDP	2015	CERDP	2014/16/18	IPU
Portugal	2013	IPU	2017	CERDP	2014/16/18	IPU
Romania	2017	IPU	2017	IPU	2014/16/18	IPU
Slovakia	2016	CERDP	2016	CERDP	2014/16/18	IPU
Slovenia	2017	IPU	2017	IPU	2014/16/18	IPU
Spain	2015	CERDP	2017	Spanish PW***	2014/16/18	IPU
Sweden	2017	IPU	2017	IPU	2014/16/18	IPU
UK	2017	IPU	2017	IPU	2014/16/18	IPU

Note:

* https://www.parliament.bg/pub/parliamentarybudget/20170111023820NS_Budget-2017.pdf

** http://www.mfin.hr/hr/drzavni-proracun-2017-godina

*** http://www.congreso.es/docu/pge2017/pge_2017-web/PGE-ROM/doc/1/3/2/2/1/N_17_A_R_31_102_1_1_1_1911N_3.PDF

Table D4 Calculation of financial parliamentary capacity (F)

	Budget in local currency	Local currency	PPP*	Budget adjusted to PPP - dollars	Number of MPs**	Budget adjusted to PPP divided by MPs
Austria	56 230 000	Euro	0,78	72 089 743	183	393933,022
Belgium	141 535 100	Euro	0,781	181 222 919	150	1208152,79
Bulgaria	566 000	BGN	0,682	829 912	240	3457,96667
Croatia	126 779 474	HRK	3,371	37 608 862	151	249065,311
Denmark	818 130 000	DKK	6,951	117 699 611	179	657539,726
Estonia	21 466 000	Estonia Kroon	0,535	40 123 364	101	397261,03
Finland	129 500 000	Euro	0,899	144 048 943	200	720244,715
France	576 295 229	Euro	0,776	742 648 490	577	1287085,77
Germany	851 435 000	Euro	0,754	1 129 224 137	620	1821329,25
Greece	132 985 000	Euro	0,586	226 936 860	300	756456,2
Hungary	37 201 151 000	HUF	136,068	273 401 174	199	1373875,25
Ireland	127 433 000	Euro	0,797	159 890 840	166	963197,831
Italy	945 116 571	Euro	0,696	1 357 926 107	630	2155438,27
Netherlands	132 429 000	Euro	0,81	163 492 592	150	1089950,61
Portugal	168 515 253	Euro	0,58	290 543 539	230	1263232,78
Romania	315 806 000	RON	1,645	191 979 331	334	574788,416
Slovakia	39 666 000	Euro	0,482	82 294 605	150	548630,7
Slovenia	24 365 310	Euro	0,576	42 300 885	90	470009,833
Spain	85 517 350	Euro	0,641	133 412 402	350	381178,291
Sweden	1 761 000 000	SEK	8,856	198 848 238	349	569765,725
UK	225 800 000	GBP	0,691	326 772 793	650	502727,374

Note:

* The coefficient of the year of the data ** (of the year of the data)

APPENDIX E – DISTRIBUTION OF CASES IN OUTCOME AND CONDITIONS

Figure E1 Distribution in Outcome (e-engagement index)

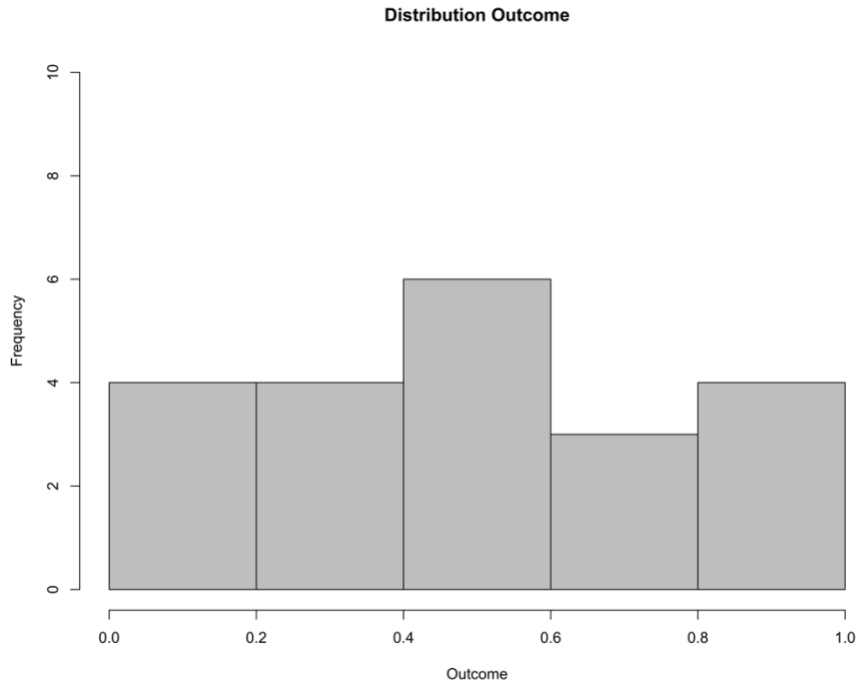


Figure E2 Distribution in conditions

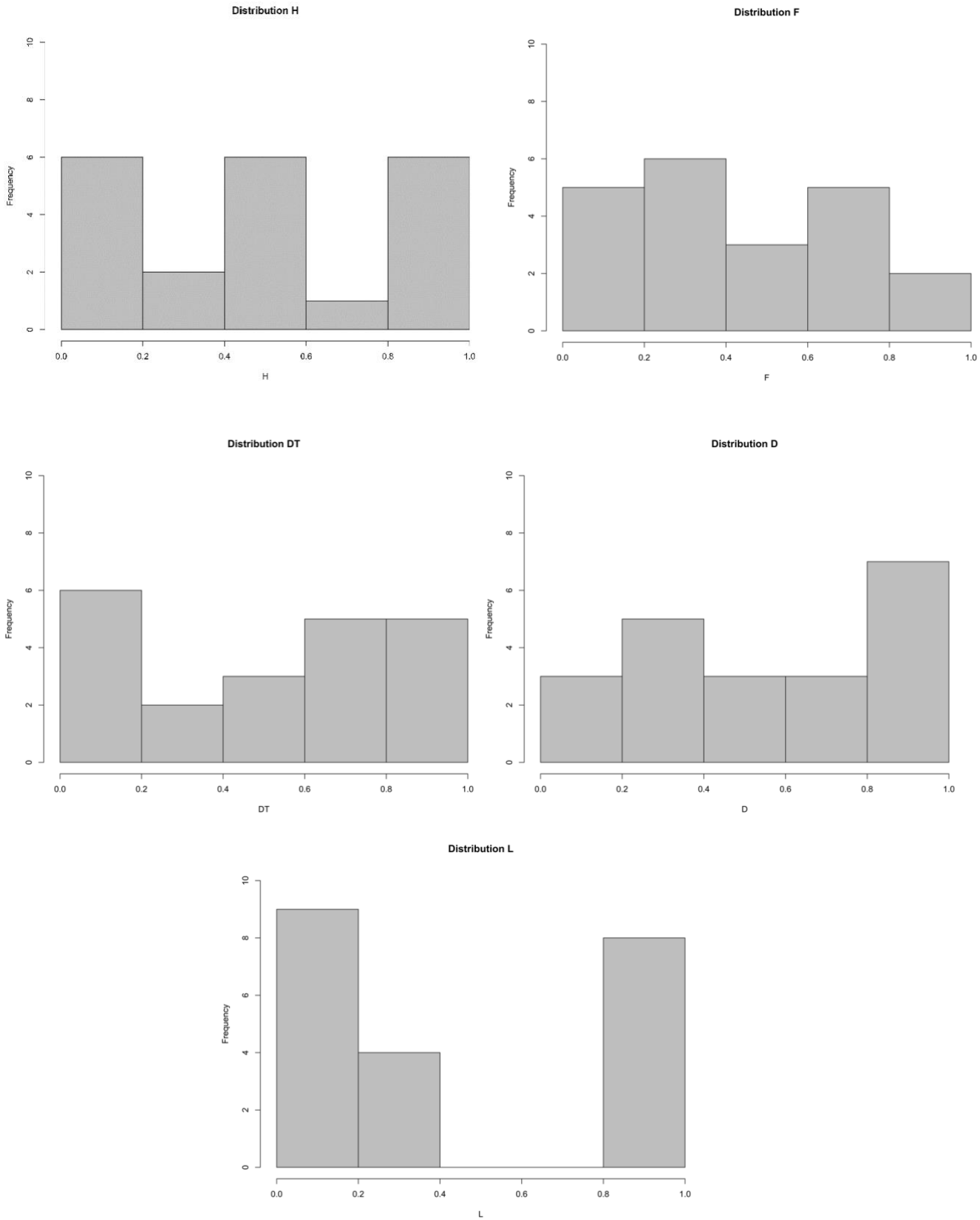
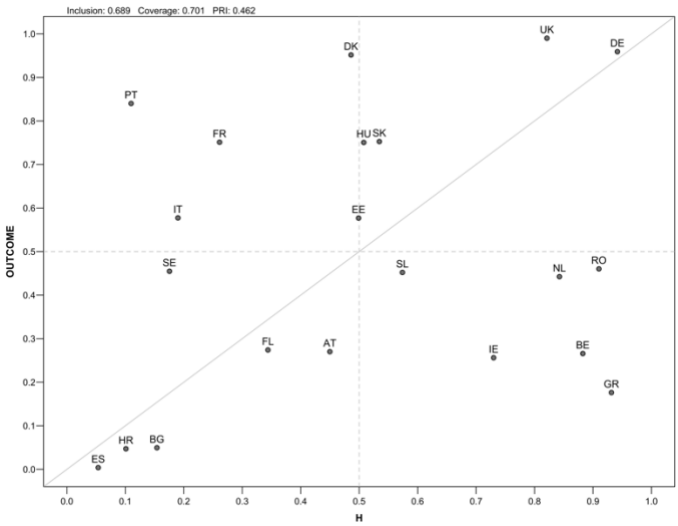
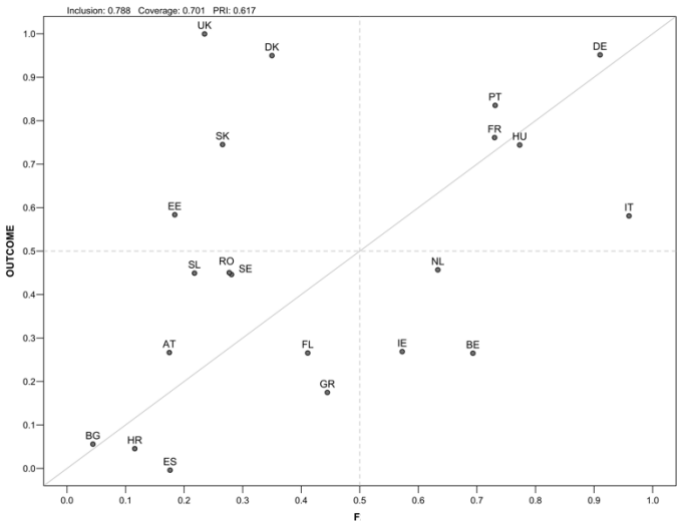


Figure E3 Plots E-engagement index (outcome) and conditions

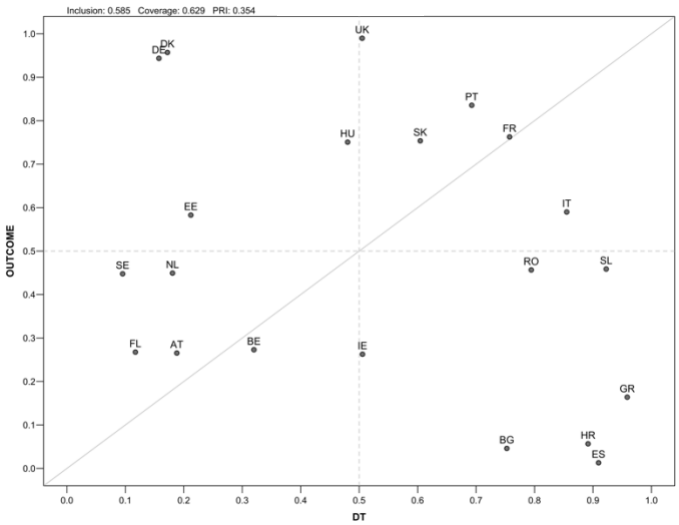
E_H_Plot



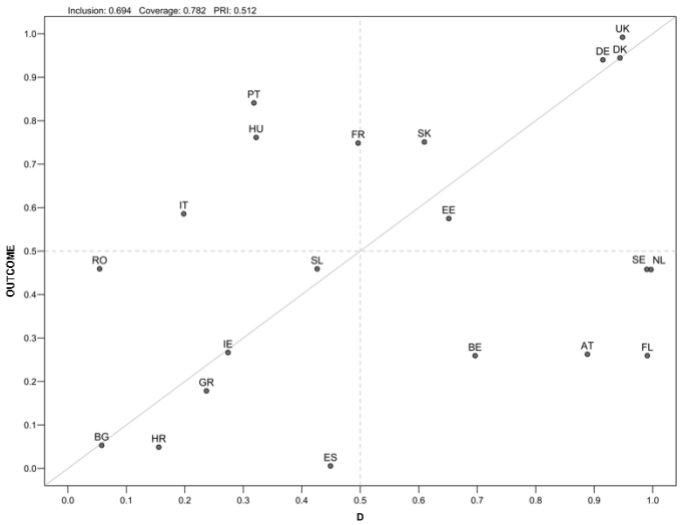
E_F_Plot



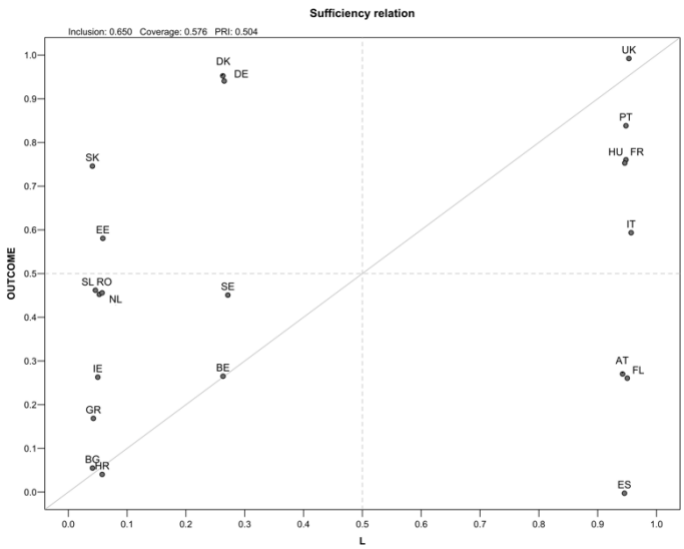
E_DT_Plot



E_D_Plot



E_L_Plot



APPENDIX F – QCA: ALL SOLUTIONS

Table F1 Conservative solution (presence of outcome)

M1: D*DT*f*H + d*DT*L*F*h + D*dt*l*F*H + D*dt*l*f*h + d*dt*L*F*H => ENG

	incl	PRI	covS	covU	cases
1 D*DT*f*H	0.950	0.822	0.395	0.119	SK; UK
2 d*DT*L*F*h	0.890	0.762	0.298	0.121	FR,IT,PT
3 D*dt*l*F*H	0.823	0.596	0.321	0.087	BE,DE,NL
4 D*dt*l*f*h	0.891	0.662	0.300	0.071	DK,EE,SE
5 d*dt*L*F*H	0.976	0.872	0.194	0.003	HU
M1	0.844	0.698	0.733		

Table F2 Intermediate solution (presence of outcome)

M1: D*l + D*DT*H + DT*L*F + L*F*H => ENG

	incl	PRI	covS	covU	cases
1 D*l	0.774	0.561	0.503	0.184	DK,EE,SE; BE,DE,NL; SK
2 D*DT*H	0.949	0.826	0.424	0.028	SK; UK
3 DT*L*F	0.903	0.807	0.404	0.140	FR,IT,PT
4 L*F*H	0.961	0.880	0.308	0.017	HU
M1	0.807	0.658	0.806		

Table 4 Parsimonious solution (presence of outcome)

M1: D*DT + D*l + L*F => ENG
M2: D*DT + dt*l + L*F => ENG
M3: D*l + D*H + L*F => ENG
M4: D*l + L*F + L*H => ENG
M5: D*l + L*H + F*h => ENG
M6: D*H + dt*l + L*F => ENG

	incl	PRI	covS	covU	(M1)	(M2)	(M3)	(M4)	(M5)	(M6)	cases
1 D*DT	0.876	0.696	0.474	0.000	0.028	0.093					SK, UK
2 D*l	0.774	0.561	0.503	0.000	0.168		0.056	0.321	0.228		DK, EE, SE, BE, DE, NL, SK
3 D*H	0.839	0.671	0.638	0.017		0.082		0.141			BE, DE, NL, SK, UK

4 dt*l 0.723 0.490 0.453 0.011 0.184 0.066 DK, EE, SE, BE, DE, NL
5 L*F 0.879 0.776 0.485 0.024 0.154 0.154 0.184 0.167 0.184 HU FR, IT, PT
6 L*H 0.926 0.831 0.373 0.000 0.065 0.070 HU, UK
7 F*h 0.901 0.771 0.518 0.000 0.147 FR, IT, PT

Table F4 Conservative solution (absence of outcome)

M1: d*DT*l*H + d*DT*f*h + D*dt*L*f*h => eng

	incl	PRI	covS	covU	cases
1 d*DT*l*H	0.885	0.717	0.359	0.157	GR, RO, SL, IE
2 d*DT*f*h	0.933	0.862	0.425	0.169	BG, HR, ES
3 D*dt*L*f*h	0.848	0.579	0.268	0.123	AT, FL
M1	0.884	0.790	0.705		

Table F5 Intermediate solution (absence of outcome)

M1: d*DT*l*H + d*DT*f*h + D*L*f*h => eng

	incl	PRI	covS	covU	cases
1 d*DT*l*H	0.885	0.717	0.359	0.157	GR, RO, SL, IE
2 d*DT*f*h	0.933	0.862	0.425	0.134	BG, HR, ES
3 D*L*f*h	0.859	0.667	0.303	0.123	AT, FL
M1	0.884	0.790	0.705		

Table F6 Parsimonious solution (absence of outcome)

M1: d*l + L*f*h => eng

	incl	PRI	covS	covU	cases
1 d*l	0.896	0.819	0.534	0.443	BG, HR, GR, RO, SL, IE
2 L*f*h	0.872	0.731	0.339	0.247	ES, AT, FL
M1	0.879	0.793	0.782		

APPENDIX G – INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction

Thank you so much for giving me this interview. I am very grateful for your support. Before, we start the interview, can you please introduce yourself: your name and your role in the parliament.

Part A.1 [Common elements across case studies: MPs & Staff]

- Do you know how many services/departments are responsible for promoting public engagement and informing citizens?
    - Do you know how many people are involved in these services?
    - Are there any services/staff specifically for the maintenance of the website? Specific for building a bridge between the public and parliament?
- Can you explain all the different ways the [country] parliament is currently engaging with citizens by using the internet and digital tools? (E.g. Electronic petitions; the Extend procedure; Social media)
    - Looking at the past times and the present, did the parliament restructured its services and expanded its engagement activities in the last years? How so?
        - If yes:
        - Who was involved in this process? Which services and departments?
        - How much time did it take?
        - Other than the general principle of seeking openness and accessibility, what is the purpose of this public engagement expansion? (Why was it restructured or developed?)
- In your opinion, nowadays how the new media and internet can help parliaments connecting to citizens? (e.g. website; social media)
- In your opinion, what is the main purpose of parliamentary websites?
    - What is the main purpose of [country] parliamentary website?
    - In your opinion what are the main advantages and current limitations and drawbacks of the [country] parliamentary website?
    - For you as an MP/staff member, what you would like to see on the website that is not there?

Part A.2 [Common elements across case studies: just for MPs]

- To what extent do you think digital media has changed the style or focus of representation, in relation to what would be expected via traditional means of communication?
- Do you feel that the [country] parliament gives you all the tools to be able to "go online" and represent your constituency in the best way and facing the challenges of the new millennium?

Part B [Country specific questions: Austria]

Since September, Austrian citizens with 16 or more years have the opportunity to submit comments on ministerial drafts via the Website. This procedure was created by the Resolution of the National Council of 16 May 2017 (200E)

- How do you see this process?
- In which ways were you involved in such process?
- How did this resolution start? Did parliament find inspiration from other cases elsewhere?
- Do you think the possibility to submit comments as well support/agree with the comments already made and published online is good for democracy? In which ways?
    - The procedure does not give the possibility to disagree with the draft or the comments already made. Do you think it should give this possibility?
- Do you think this procedure assures more transparency? Accountability? And promotes public engagement?
- Do you believe people will join and participate?
- Would you like to see other tools on the website to promote public engagement? Which ones?

Part B [Country specific questions: Portugal]

Recentemente foi criado um GT para o parlamento digital, que funcionou entre 2016 e 2018 e ouviu vários especialistas.

- O que acha da iniciativa do Presidente da Assembleia?
- O que acha que motivou esta iniciativa? Porquê agora (2016)?

- Em que medida o trabalho do GT foi importante na restruturação dos serviços parlamentos? E de que forma expandiu as actividades de envolvimento público? Quem esteve envolvido neste processo? Quais os actors e serviços?
- Que outputs e alterações resultaram desse GT? Houve coisas por fazer? Se sim, porque não foram implementadas?
- No relatório final é mencionada que a reforma do parlamento digital passou "por intensificar a presença da AR nas redes sociais". Ou seja intensificou-se de facto a utilização das contas? Foram criadas novas contas? Vão ser criadas no futuro?
- Neste momento o parlamento continua só a ter contas temáticas e não uma conta geral. Porquê? Qual é que deve ser a estratégia a seguir no que diz respeito à utilização das redes sociais?
- Umas das alterações resultantes do GT, foi o Website. De que forma o website foi alterado?
- A usabilidade e navegabilidade do website foi uma questão tida em conta nesta reforma?

APPENDIX H – LIST OF INTERVIEWS AND INFORMED CONSENT

Table H1 List of Interviews (Portugal and Austria)

Occupation/Role	**Name**	**Date**
Vice-Speaker of the Portuguese Parliament	Jorge Lacão	14.03.2019
Member of Parliament	João Almeida	22.02.2019
Member of Parliament	*	24.01.2019
Member of Parliament	*	05.02.2019
Member of Parliament	Luís Monteiro	31.01.2019
Member of Parliament	José Magalhães	08.03.2019
Member of Parliament	Nicolaus Sherack	10.10.2018
Party Official (SPO)	Peter Pointer	05.10.2018
Official (Spokeperson of the parliamentary administration)	Karl-Heinz Grundböck	24.09.2018
Official (Citizens Inquiry service)	Barbara Blumel	24.09.2018
Official (IT Department)	Harald Niederhuber	28.09.2018
Official (Head of the Department of Scientific Support and Coordination in Parliamentary Matters)	Christoph Konrath	24.09.2019
Official (Head of the Strategic Media division)	Ines Kerle	24.09.2018
Official (former Head of DAP)	*	18.01.2019
Official (Head of DILP)	Fernando Marques	
Official (Head of the Communications Office)	João Amaral	18.01.2019
Official (Webmaster/IT department)	*	24.02.2019
Official (member of the 'Digital Parliament' group)	*	01.02.2019
Head of Hemiciclo (PMO)	David Crisóstomo	22.01.2019
Lobbyist	Andreas Kovar	17.09.2018
Portuguese Political Expert	*	06.02.2019
Austrian Political Expert	Katrin Auel	22.09.2018
Austrian Political Expert	Johannes Pollak	18.09.2018

Note: * This interviewee choose to not be indentified by his name

Research project title: Twenty first century parliaments: Parliamentary online public engagement. From a comparative perspective to a focus on Austria and Portugal

Researcher: Sofia Serra-Silva

Research Participants name:

The interview will take approximately 30 minutes. We don't anticipate that there are any risks associated with your participation, but you have the right to stop the interview or withdraw from the research at any time.

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed as part of the above research project. Ethical procedures for academic research undertaken from Portuguese institutions require that interviewees explicitly agree to being interviewed and how the information contained in their interview will be used. This consent form is necessary for us to ensure that you understand the purpose of your involvement and that you agree to the conditions of your participation. Would you therefore read the accompanying information sheet and then sign this form to certify that you approve the following:

- the interview will be recorded and a transcript will be produced
- the transcript of the interview will be analysed by Sofia Serra-Silva as research investigator;
- any summary interview content, or direct quotations from the interview, that are made available through academic publication or other academic outlets will be anonymized so that you cannot be identified, and care will be taken to ensure that other information in the interview that could identify yourself is not revealed;
- any variation of the conditions above will only occur with your further explicit approval

Quotation Agreement

I also understand that my words may be quoted directly. With regards to being quoted, please initial next to any of the statements that you agree with:

	I wish to review the notes, transcripts, or other data collected during the research pertaining to my participation.
	I agree to be quoted directly.
	I agree to be quoted directly if my name is not published and a made-up name (pseudonym) or if my position/professional occupation is used.
	I agree that the researchers may publish documents that contain quotations by me.

By signing this form I agree that;

1. I am voluntarily taking part in this project. I understand that I don't have to take part, and I can stop the interview at any time;
2. The transcribed interview or extracts from it may be used as described above;
3. I have read the Information sheet;
4. I don't expect to receive any benefit or payment for my participation;
5. I can request a copy of the transcript of my interview and may make edits I feel necessary to ensure the effectiveness of any agreement made about confidentiality;
6. I have been able to ask any questions I might have, and I understand that I am free to contact the researcher with any questions I may have in the future.

_____ _____

Participants Date

_____ _____

Researcher Signature Date

Contact Information

If you have any further questions or concerns about this study, please contact:

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